

ELIZABETH, BETSY and BESS SCHOOLMATES



AMY E. BLANCHARD



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—Schoolmates

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Elizabeth, Betsy, and Bess —Schoolmates

By
AMY E. ^{ella} BLANCHARD
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ELIZABETH, BETSY AND BESS — SCHOOLMATES

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TO

ELIZABETH EVARTS PERKINS

DEAR FOR THE SAKE OF HERSELF, HER MOTHER,
AND HER MOTHER'S MOTHER

A. E. B.

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ELIZABETH, BETSY AND BESS SCHOOLMATES

CHAPTER I

BEFORE A HOLIDAY

MISS JEWETT had just rung the bell and the children trooped into the schoolroom, taking their places as quietly as exuberant youthful spirits would permit, the smallest boys and girls in the front row, the older ones further back. It was a cheerful room, and Elizabeth, by the side of her chum, Betsy, thought of the changes which had taken place there since Miss Jewett was installed as teacher. Where had been bare walls, except for a couple of uninteresting maps, now were attractive pictures which brought visions of all sorts of delightful historical places; shelves in front of the windows displayed gay, blossoming plants, while in an aquarium, standing in their midst, gold-fish darted about. In the centre of the black-board Miss Jewett had just drawn the picture of a man and woman in Puritan dress; a big yellow pumpkin ornamented one corner

of the board, in another was a turkey, in the third an ear of corn and in the fourth a squirrel nibbling a nut. The pictures were drawn with colored chalks and there was not a child who did not look upon them with sparkling eyes.

“Thanksgiving,” the whisper went around. Miss Jewett nodded. “Yes, Thanksgiving, and when we come to our history lesson I will tell you how our first Thanksgiving Day originated and why we still keep it in remembrance.” Then Miss Jewett took up her violin and drew the bow across the strings. She paused a moment before she began to play. “We will sing a very old hymn this morning,” she said, “one that was written by a man named Kethe, away back in the sixteenth century, and it might well have been sung by the Pilgrim Fathers on that first Thanksgiving Day. It is very quaintly worded, I think. You may all look for it in your hymnals; it begins: ‘All people that on earth do dwell,’ and we shall sing it to the tune Old Hundred, for that seems most appropriate, as the tune is as old as the hymn.”

She started the first note and Elizabeth gave a quick sigh of pleasure. It was a constant surprise

and delight to her to find how many things Miss Jewett could do: she could play the violin and sing sweetly, if not very powerfully; she could draw wonderful things on the board; she wore the daintiest and most becoming clothes and she made the lessons a pleasure instead of a task. Surely she was the most wonderful teacher in the world, and Elizabeth adored her. "Anything more like an angel than Miss Jewett could not possibly be," she confided to Betsy at recess, "especially when she plays the violin."

"But angels play on harps," objected Bess Ferguson who had joined them.

"They don't always," returned Elizabeth, "for I've seen pictures of them with violins; Betsy's uncle Rob has one among the photographs he brought from Europe."

That settled it and Bess had no more to say; indeed, Elizabeth had a way of forcing unanswerable arguments upon this less quick-witted friend of hers, and it was seldom that she did not get the best of it. Just here Flo Harris came up and was greeted cordially; she was not often invited to join this trio, for it was an understood thing that Elizabeth with

her first best friend, Betsy, and her second best, Bess, did not care for an addition to the group at lunch time. It was regarded as a privilege when another girl was admitted; Flo, however, had special claims upon this occasion, for this was her first appearance after some weeks of illness. She was still rather pale and thin, and the girls regarded her with something like admiring envy.

"Come right over here, Flo," Elizabeth invited her. "We have a lovely lunch today. Betsy has some of those great big red grapes that grow in her aunt's garden, Bess has some special cakes and I have a special jar of marmalade. You're well enough to eat anything now, aren't you?" she asked a little anxiously.

"Oh dear, yes," returned Flo, accepting the attentions offered, "but I have been awfully ill; I wasn't expected to live."

The three girls gazed at her with new interest. The phrase, "not expected to live" had a weird fascination for them all, Elizabeth especially. She had never reached such a danger point, although she had gone through an ordeal during the summer when an accident threatened to rob her of her sight.

"Well," she said, "I was never quite that bad, although I did nearly have my eyes put out."

"And once I was awfully ill with measles," put in Bess.

"Yes, but you were never where they gave you up," returned Flo in triumph. "There was one night when, my mother said, the doctor declared that he didn't expect I would live till morning." Again the alluring phrase.

Elizabeth offered another spoonful of marmalade, Betsy laid half a second bunch of grapes in Flo's lap and Bess added her last cake, from which she had just taken one bite.

"You look so lovely and pale," said Elizabeth admiringly. "I would give anything to be pale; it is so interesting. I think when I die I would like to languish away," she added sentimentally, "although I wouldn't like to have a worm feed on my damask cheek."

"Who had that?" inquired Flo with interest.

"Why, don't you know the poetry that says a worm in the bud fed on her damask cheek?"

At this a merry little chuckle sounded from just above them and Miss Jewett's bright face looked

out from the window; "Elizabeth, you funny girl," she said, "you don't get that quotation right; it is: 'And let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek.'"

"I always thought it was a worm, a real live worm," replied Elizabeth, quite taken aback. "I don't believe I understand it yet, Miss Jewett."

"Neither do I," spoke up Flo.

"Why, it means this: that the young woman concealed her love and the effort to do so showed its effect; concealment took her vitality, the rose from her cheek, and made her pale — just as a worm in the bud of a rose destroys it."

"Oh!" The girls saw the point. "I am rather glad it is that way," decided Elizabeth, "for I cannot bear any kind of worm, and Betsy is always teasing by putting caterpillars on me; I dislike them more than spiders. Miss Jewett, did you know that Flo wasn't expected to live?"

"Yes, I heard the sad news at the time. We are very thankful to have her back again, aren't we? I hope she will get some roses into her pale cheeks."

"I think it is nice to be pale," remarked Elizabeth honestly.

"Oh dear me, what a notion," exclaimed Miss Jewett. "It is much nicer to be rosy and healthy and strong and active."

Elizabeth looked doubtful. She was generally very ready to adopt Miss Jewett's opinions, but she could not give up this treasured idea at once though she did not say so; instead she asked solemnly, "Miss Jewett, were you ever at the point of death?"

Miss Jewett smiled. "I believe so, when I was a child."

Elizabeth sighed regretfully. "I never was."

"You think it is something to boast of?" said Miss Jewett. "Why?"

Elizabeth cast about in her mind for a true reason, but she could not settle upon a satisfactory one. "I don't know exactly," she answered at last, "but we girls always do. I suppose it is just like having the biggest or the finest or the rarest of anything; we feel proud of it because it goes ahead of what the rest have."

Miss Jewett laughed. "That is not a bad explanation, Elizabeth. You use your mind very well, though one doesn't always want to be the biggest in all directions."

"No," returned Elizabeth with conviction, "I shouldn't want to be the biggest liar or thief, for instance."

They all laughed, Miss Jewett included. "You'd better come in now," she said. "We want to have that Thanksgiving story, you remember."

"But that won't even be a fib," retorted Elizabeth merrily.

"No, we can depend upon its being solid fact," returned her teacher.

Having disposed of the last remnant of marmalade, the final grape and the remainder of the cake, the girls shook the crumbs from their laps and went inside to hear the story of the first Thanksgiving, and then to go forth, somewhat earlier than usual, for their holiday. On the way home there was great talk of the next day's jollification. Miss Jewett and her aunt, Miss Dunbar, were to dine at Betsy Tyson's, and the afternoon Betsy and Elizabeth were to spend together at the home of the latter. This was determined upon after Betsy explained that she would be left alone otherwise. "There will be no one at home," she told her friends, "for uncle Rob and Hal are going to the football game with Miss Jewett and your sister Kathie, Elizabeth."

“What will your aunt Emily do?” queried Elizabeth.

“She and Miss Dunbar are going to take tea with Mrs. Lynde.”

“And I have to stay at home,” complained Bess. “Grandma said she couldn’t think of my going away from home on Thanksgiving.”

“It will be rather stupid, won’t it?” said Elizabeth compassionately.

“Yes, it will,” returned Bess in an aggrieved voice. “I wish you and Betsy would come over and spend the afternoon with me.”

“Oh, but —” Elizabeth began and looked at Betsy. There was never much fun in visiting at Mrs. Lynde’s; everything was so spick and span, so very orderly. Mrs. Lynde did not like any noise and would not permit anything out of place. The girls never had as good a time anywhere as at Elizabeth’s home, the least pretentious among them all. For this holiday Betsy and Elizabeth had planned a specially entertaining afternoon and were not ready to give it up.

“I promised Elizabeth I would spend the afternoon with her,” said Betsy doubtfully.

“Couldn’t you possibly come to my house, Bess?” asked Elizabeth. Although Bess would not be any great addition to the proposed play, Elizabeth was quite willing to include her.

Bess shook her head. “No, grandma and mamma both said I must stay with them.”

“Oh dear! Well then they won’t want us,” decided Elizabeth, “for on a holiday like Thanksgiving we wouldn’t think of going unless they particularly invited us, would we, Betsy?” Elizabeth was rather pleased with herself at having found a way out of the difficulty.

“But if I ask them they will invite you,” persisted Bess.

“It wouldn’t be the same,” Elizabeth was positive. “They probably will go to drive and will want you with them; there wouldn’t be room for us and so you see we’d only be in the way.” Elizabeth spoke forcibly, the slower Bess finding no answering argument.

“You’ll have lovely things to eat,” Elizabeth went on, trying to console Bess, “and you’ll wear that beautiful new frock, of course. We might run in for a teentsy-weentsy minute to see you in it, after

church, you know. We could do that, couldn't we?" She turned to Betsy to receive her assenting nod, and Bess, pleased at the prospect of displaying her finery, gave up further urging.

"Walk up to the next corner with me, Betsy," said Elizabeth to her first best as they left Bess at her own gate, and Betsy agreed.

"I never saw anyone like you, Elizabeth," said the latter admiringly. "You always know just what to say to Bess to make her satisfied. We really didn't exactly want her, did we? Yet she wasn't a bit offended."

"I didn't mind her coming to our house," declared Elizabeth; "it was only that I didn't want to go to hers. It would be as dry as pine needles to sit around in that stiff way, as they do at her house. We couldn't jump about or run or make the least noise, for Bess would have to be careful of her new frock, and we'd have to talk in whispers and do some crazy fancy work or something. That reminds me, Betsy, I have a lovely idea for Christmas. If you will come over some rainy Saturday we can fabricate something nice."

"What?" asked Betsy.

"Why, some little sachets, not sachets exactly, either — scent bags. I thought of them long ago, and I gathered all the sweet-smelling leaves and things I could from the garden to put in the bags: lemon verbenas, rose leaves, bergamot, rose geranium, lavender, and oh, — lots. I'll give you some. My only trouble is to find bits of silk or ribbon to make the bags of; Kathie confisticates everything of that kind."

"I'll tell you what we can do," returned Betsy; "we can swap. I'll furnish the pieces and you can furnish the filling. Aunt Emily is very nice about letting me have pieces; she likes to encourage me in doing fancy work," Betsy laughed. "I could have gathered sweet things from our garden, too," she went on, "but I didn't think of it and it is too late now, so the best I can do is to supply the outsides while you supply the insides."

"Oh, that's lovely of you, Betsy," responded Elizabeth appreciatively. "Of course it is too late to get garden things now, for the frost has nipped everything, and besides they have to be dried. Won't it be something nice to look forward to for the next rainy day? We'll go up into my playroom and make

the bags; it will be quite light by the window, you know, even if it is in the attic. I speak to make the prettiest for Miss Jewett."

"Oh dear," responded Betsy disappointedly, "I was just going to say that myself; you always do get ahead of me, Elizabeth."

"Why, no, I don't, but — I suppose it wouldn't do for each of us to give her one, would it? Even if they were different. Well, I will tell you what; if I think of anything just as nice I'll agree to your having the prettiest piece and to giving that bag to Miss Jewett."

"And if you don't think of anything, what then?"

"Then maybe you will."

"Now, Elizabeth, you know I am not anything like as clever as you about having ideas for such things."

"You flatter me, your serene highness. All right, then I can ask Kath; she knows of lots of things to make and she will show me how when I tell her the good cause. I'll give up the bag if you want it so much."

"I suppose I am a mean, selfish worm," sighed Betsy, "but it does go to the spot to have anything

as nice as that for Miss Jewett, and besides she is to be my aunt, you know, and I have the right to give her the best."

Elizabeth inwardly resented this, but there was no denying the fact, to her mind, and she could answer only: "Woe is me, that she is not to be mine, but you know something else; we'll have the same brother and sister after awhile."

They stopped at the corner, Betsy declaring she could not go a step further; therefore, walking backwards, they called to one another till Elizabeth, stumbling against the protruding roots of a tree, thought best to face about, calling over her shoulder: "See you at church tomorrow."

CHAPTER II

PRISONERS

ELIZABETH and Betsy were left in possession.

Even Electra had the afternoon and evening off on Thanksgiving Day. Elizabeth's big brother, Dick, with his chum, Hal Tyson, Betsy's brother, had gone to a football game, taking Kathie and one of her girl friends. Mr. and Mrs. Hollins had determined upon a drive, after the hearty Thanksgiving dinner, and had taken Babs with them to see some relatives five miles distant, while Bert had been allowed to go to the game, too.

"I don't know about leaving you two little girls all alone," said Mrs. Hollins doubtfully, as she was putting on her hat. "Don't you think you'd better come with us? We can take the surrey just as well as the buggy, and then there will be plenty of room."

"Oh, dearest love-mother, we don't want to go,"

replied Elizabeth. "We'd so much rather stay here and play by ourselves. We will not get into any mischief, I solemnly asseverate. We're going to play up in my playroom and the attic and we will be right there when you come back. We've eaten so much dinner that we shall not want to descend to the nether regions for any food and we will be as safe as crickets under a big stone."

"You ridiculous child, I hope you will be safe. I will see that the outside doors and windows are fastened and we will take the latch-key. If you promise to play in the attic and not to do anything with matches or fire, I think I can trust you."

"We won't have a single sentiment of fire or matches and we will be just as good as pie,—as the pumpkin pie we had for dinner. I'll tell you what we're going to play, mother. It is very much according to the day, a historical sort of entertainment: we're going to play Mayflower and Plymouth Rock and Indians. I've thought it all out. The big chest is to be Plymouth Rock and the old rocking-chair the Mayflower. You won't mind our hitching the chair along the floor a little so as to make it more like sailing. I haven't decided whether

I shall be John Alden or Myles Standish; maybe I can be both. Betsy is going to be Priscilla, and we are going to be very historical and thankful, so you see we shall not have any chance of getting into mischief."

"Then if that is the case I can leave you. There are ginger-snaps in the stone jar in the pantry, if you get hungry."

"Oh, but I don't believe the Pilgrims had ginger-snaps, do you? Perhaps they had plum-duff. I don't know what that is exactly, but it sounds Englishy and old-fashioned. But if our muscles need refreshment after our arduous journey we will seek the stone jar, mother."

"Betsy will stay with you till some one comes, I suppose."

"Oh yes, for Dick is coming home after the football game and of course Hal will come, too, and one of them can take Betsy home. Besides, Bert will be back before the rest because he has gone on his wheel to the game."

"Very well, then I think I need not worry about you. I see your father coming with the buggy, so I must go."

"Good-bye, then, dearest mother Alden. Kiss me farewell, for your son John is going on a long journey across seas to a new country. Ye good ship Mayflower bears him away."

"Good-bye, son John," returned Mrs. Hollins, falling into Elizabeth's make-believe. "I hope your journey will be all you expect. We shall try to be back by dark," and, responding to Babs' vociferous call, Mrs. Hollins went out.

"Now then," said Elizabeth, not waiting to see her parents off, "we will hie to the ship, Priscilla."

They rushed off upstairs, a corner of which was given over to Elizabeth for a playroom. Here she kept her favorite books, her dolls, her treasures of various kinds. But the girls did not settle down in this usually favored place; instead they took possession of the middle of the attic, pulling a huge, old-timey rocking-chair to the point opposite a big chest. Betsy, with a handkerchief tied over head and a cheesecloth dust-cloth used as a kerchief for her shoulders, established herself in the chair, while Elizabeth hunted up a wide-brimmed felt hat of her brother Dick's and a Norfolk jacket that she might be properly attired. By dint of mighty rockings they

managed to hitch along the chair towards its destination, although it was slow work.

“Do not be cast down, Priscilla,” said the would-be John. “We shall reach our haven in good time. Methinks I see a faint upheaval yonder which has a degree of permeance not like the restless sea.” She shaded her eyes with one hand and peered forwards. “Aha!” she cried, “I am right. It is a mighty rock, and to it we will strive to make our way. Art glad, Priscilla?”

“Truly I am and very thankful,” responded Betsy. “I like not these buffeting waves.”

“Marry, neither do I!” replied Elizabeth. “It is a long and wearisome voyage we have made, but there is land at last.” She climbed to the seat of the chair and waved her hat vigorously, crying, “Land! Land!” But her violent demonstrations were too much for the clumsy craft, for it lurched backwards and the two voyagers were spilled out. They were not hurt, however, but scrambled up laughing and rubbing their elbows. “That was a mighty wave indeed,” cried Elizabeth. “A little more and we had been drowned, Priscilla. We must now wade ashore and reach the rock.” With

much pretended effort they managed to do this, clambering to the top of the chest and falling upon their knees in thankfulness.

The next thing was to build themselves a house, which they did from some broken chairs and discarded umbrellas. But it was too tame a matter to sit there for very long, and Elizabeth rushed off to hunt game, returning breathless and reporting the meeting of a fierce savage. Leaving their house behind them, they escaped to the house of a neighbor, where, for no reason at all, they declared themselves safer, and where suddenly John Alden changed into Myles Standish, to go forth doughtily and fight the Indians. Priscilla was also transformed into a man, electing to be William Bradford.

However, they soon tired of battling with Indians and decided that something more sentimental would be to their liking. "I'll tell you what," said Elizabeth; "there's an old spinning-wheel somewhere about; we can get that and you can be Priscilla and say, 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?' You can be sitting at the wheel and be singing the hymn we had at school yesterday, and I will come in. I think there is an old hymn-book

in the store closet where mother packs away the winter clothes. It is locked, but the key is hanging right by the door."

They dragged forth the old spinning-wheel, after Priscilla had resumed her maidenly dress, and then they went to hunt up the dilapidated hymn-book which Elizabeth remembered having seen on the shelf of the locked closet. It was a Yale lock, but easily opened, and in a few moments they were inside the closet, which was really like a little room and was lighted by a small window high in the side. Elizabeth rummaged around and at last found the book.

"Here it is," she announced. "Now we will see if the same hymn is in it."

They sat down together on a box and began looking over the book. "What a queer smell this room has," said Betsy.

"It is the camphor balls," Elizabeth told her. "Mother has been unpacking some of the clothes for winter and I came across a paper box of the balls while I was looking for the book. Here's the hymn all right, Betsy. Now, come, let's go back."

But this was easier said than done, for, upon try-

ing the door, they found it had swung to and was locked, the key being still on the outside.

"Now we've done it," cried Elizabeth. "We are prisoners, Betsy, for there is no possible way of getting out."

"What shall we do?" cried Betsy, looking distressed.

"We can't do anything till the family come home. We shall just have to stay here and amuse ourselves the best we can; it won't be so very long. They will miss us and will come up to look, then when we hear them we will bang on the door and call to them."

"But it may not be for ever so long after they get back."

"Oh yes, it will, for they will know we don't want to stay up here in the dark. We can really play just as well in here even if it is smelly. We can pretend we are prisoners taken by the Indians, or that we are hiding from them and don't dare to come out."

Somewhat comforted, Betsy accepted the situation with a good grace, though they did not find playing prisoner a particularly exciting game and

soon wearied of it. In the face of bare walls and not much space Elizabeth's imagination failed her and they sat down rather crestfallen to wait rescuers.

They had been silent for about five minutes when suddenly Elizabeth jumped up, saying, "I know what we can do; we can play jacks with the moth balls."

"That is an idea," Betsy said in a pleased voice. "It will be much better than sitting still doing nothing."

Elizabeth lifted the box of moth balls from the shelf. They cleared a space on the top of the box where they had been sitting, and, squatting down upon the floor, they began the game. The novelty of their playthings lasted till dark began to set in and they could no longer see to play. The little room was so dimly lighted that it was really not so late as it seemed, even on this November afternoon. They were not uncomfortable for there were parcels of blankets and such things wrapped in paper and piled up on the floor; these they leaned against, taking various positions as they became restless.

"It isn't so very warm, is it?" said Betsy, after a long silence.

"No, but we can easily get out something to wrap ourselves up in. I think if we were to lie down we might be more comfortable. We can make a bed of some of these big packages; it won't hurt, and I will get out a blanket to put over us."

This was a new arrangement and they laughingly prepared to lie down, cuddling under a heavy blanket and feeling quite satisfied to wait events. It grew darker and darker. It was very still in the house and very still in the little room; only the sound of gentle breathing came from the pallet on the floor.

In course of time the various members of the family returned. First came Bert, who, finding that the door was locked, did not attempt to get in, but went off to Patsy McGonigle's to see how he had fared upon Thanksgiving Day. Next came a merry party of young people. Dick had a latch-key and let in the crowd. They went into the parlor and began to sing college songs, then Neal Paine proposed that all go over to his house.

"I'm jolly hungry myself, after that long ride," he said, "and we've a barrel of oysters sent up for Thanksgiving, so what's the matter with going over, all of us, and having an oyster roast?"

"First-rate," agreed Hal.

"So say we all of us," Dick seconded him. So out they all rushed across the street, leaving the house to silence though not to utter darkness.

Not long after this the wheels of the buggy crunched up the driveway. Mrs. Hollins and Babs alighted and Mr. Hollins drove off to the barn. "By the looks of things I should say that Dick and the rest had returned," remarked Mrs. Hollins as she entered the lighted room. "I wonder where the little girls are. Perhaps Elizabeth has walked home with Hal and Betsy," and, leisurely taking off her coat and hat, she sat down to unfasten Babs's wraps.

Presently Mr. Hollins came in. "Where are the youngsters?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mrs. Hollins. "The boys have evidently been here. I haven't been upstairs, but I imagine that Elizabeth has walked home with Betsy and Hal; perhaps they all went off together, though Elizabeth promised to be here when I returned. Suppose you call up and see if she is at the Tysons's."

Mr. Hollins went to the 'phone, returning in a few

minutes with the report that there was no response to the call. "They're all away, I suppose," he said. "I noticed that the house was quite dark as we came by. Perhaps the girls have gone to Bess Ferguson's. I'll try there." The reply to his query was that neither of the girls was there and had not been since early in the day.

"I will go upstairs and hunt around," said Mrs. Hollins; "perhaps they are in the house after all." Leaving Babs with her father, Mrs. Hollins mounted the stairs and searched through all the rooms on the next floor, then she took a lamp and went up into the attic. Here were signs of the late presence of Elizabeth and her friend, Betsy. The big chair still lay where it had been overturned, the spinning-wheel loomed up dimly before the window, a bow and arrow of Bert's lay on the floor, garments were strewn around. "Elizabeth will have to come up to-morrow and set things to rights," murmured Mrs. Hollins, as she looked around with a half smile. Then she called softly, "Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" But there was no answer. After waiting a moment Mrs. Hollins went slowly downstairs to rejoin her husband. "I can't find them anywhere," she told

him. "I've been all over the house. Where do you suppose they can be?"

"Here comes Bert," said Mr. Hollins, "perhaps he can give us some light on the subject."

Bert came whistling up on the porch and in a moment came in. "Hallo," he said, "you've got back, haven't you? Gee! but it was a fine game."

"Have you seen anything of your sister Elizabeth?" inquired his mother.

"Not a sign. When I got back the house was all locked up so I went over to see Patsy. The McGonigles had roast pork and sweet corn and potatoes, and they were just as thankful as anything." Bert never lost an opportunity of bringing to light the virtues of the McGonigles.

"Never mind what the McGonigles had," said Mr. Hollins; "what we are more interested in is the whereabouts of your sister."

"I'll bet she is hiding somewhere just to give us a scare," declared Bert.

"Then you can go and find her," suggested his father.

Upstairs and down tramped Bert, storming at last into the attic whose shadows and dark corners

were rather disheartening to even an older person. Bert did not advance very far into the dim recesses, but, standing in the doorway, shouted stentoriously, "'Lizbeth! I say, 'Lizbeth, where are you?'"

Then something happened. Mrs. Hollins appeared with a lamp. "I have just thought," she murmured, and went straight to the door of the closet. She saw the key sticking in the lock, turned it and looked in to see an auburn head closely snuggled by the side of a dark brown one.

Bert peered around his mother's shoulder. "Well, I'll be switched if they're not asleep," he exclaimed.

Betsy sat up and rubbed her eyes. "It's very smelly in here," she remarked.

Bert went off into shouts of laughter which awakened his sister.

"You've come at last," said Elizabeth, scrambling from her improvised couch. "We thought you never would come."

"How long do you think I have been looking for you?" asked her mother, with a smile. "A full half hour. How did you happen to choose such a place for a nap?"

"We didn't choose it," answered Elizabeth. "It

chose us. We came in here to get a hymn-book and the door had to go and close itself, so we were locked in; we've been here for ages."

"Then you'd better come out as quickly as you can and get some fresh air. I don't wonder you fell asleep in that stuffy place."

The girls were only too glad to obey, and at Mrs. Hollins's suggestion ran up and down the porch ten times to get their lungs full of fresh air; then they were ready for ginger-snaps and such things, their Pilgrim days being over.

CHAPTER III

THE PIECE BAG

“ELIZABETH, you must set things to rights in the attic,” said Mrs. Hollins the next day. “Everything is in confusion there, and you know I can’t allow that.”

“Oh yes, mother, I will do it,” Elizabeth assured her, “but you see we had to leave it so yesterday because we were imprisoned, incartcerated.”

Mrs. Hollins smiled. “You dearly like a redundancy of letters in your words, don’t you, daughter?”

“What is redundancy?” inquired Elizabeth, pleased at hearing a new word.

“It means more than enough.”

“I suppose Elizabeth thinks one cannot have too much of a good thing,” remarked Dick, looking up from his book. “The longer she can make the word the better. Where were you ‘incartcerated,’ Elizabeth?”

"In the packing closet with the moth balls," replied his sister. "It was an awfully stuffy place."

"I should think so, and it is a wonder you were not asphyxiated," returned Dick. "There is a good long word for you, Libzie."

"Say it again," begged Elizabeth.

Dick repeated the word and Elizabeth slowly said it after him. "Ass-fix-he-ate-ed. It would make a lovely charade, Dick."

Her brother put back his head and roared. "I'll bet you can't spell it. I'll give you a nickel if you can."

Elizabeth made several attempts but failed in each one, so Dick finally had to tell her, and she carefully wrote it down on a piece of paper that she might puzzle Betsy when she should come, though at the same time she maintained that she still thought it would make a good charade. She was so intent upon planning this out that she entirely forgot about the condition of the attic and, as it was a bright, clear morning, she decided that if she could gather an audience and press Betsy into service they could act charades out of doors.

However, she failed in her errand, because Betsy

had gone to town with her aunt Emily and any sort of play which demanded much imagination was not worth attempting without Betsy. Bess claimed her, however, always being rather pleased when, as second best, she could demand the privileges of first best.

So all day the old rocking-chair lay on its back while Elizabeth played with Bess. When night came Mrs. Hollins reminded Elizabeth of her shortcomings.

“Elizabeth,” she said, “you did not do as I told you about putting things in order up in the attic. I went up there to get something and came near hurting myself when I stumbled over the chair. You must go up there the very first thing tomorrow and don’t come down till you have put things where they belong.”

Elizabeth was very contrite. “Oh dear, I am so forgetless,” she sighed. “Did you hurt yourself very badly, mother dear?”

“Oh no, not badly, although I might have done so, and you know my rule is that you must put back in its place anything taken away. I don’t in the least object to your amusing yourself in any innocent manner, and to your using anything that will

help to make your play more pleasant, but I have not the time to run after you and pick up after disorderly little girls."

Elizabeth accepted the reproof meekly. She knew that with but one servant her mother had more than enough to do, and she truly did not mean to make more work for her, but once an idea took possession of her it was to the exclusion of everything else.

She went to bed in a very humble frame of mind and decided before she went to sleep that she must do something to make her remember another time. Therefore, the next morning when Betsy appeared, it being a rainy day, Elizabeth was still up in the attic.

"You can go right up, Betsy," Mrs. Hollins gave permission. "I dare say you will find Elizabeth in her playroom."

Betsy ran up the stairs and called, but the voice which answered did not come from the playroom.

"Why, where are you?" inquired Betsy, peering around.

"Here!" The answer came from a dark corner.

Betsy made her way to the spot. "Why, what in

the world are you doing sitting away off there?" asked Betsy.

From the depths of the old chair Elizabeth replied: "I am doing penance. I forgot all about putting this back where it belongs, and mother nearly broke her neck falling over it, so I have to do something to make myself remember. I thought if I sat here long enough I couldn't possibly forget where the chair belonged."

"How long have you been there?" asked Betsy, quite accustomed to Elizabeth's methods of dealing out punishments to herself.

"Oh, a long time. I don't know exactly. I have put away all the other things. It looks quite orderly — don't you think so?"

"It looks very nice indeed," replied Betsy. "I should have been here to help you, for it was as much for me as for you that the things were used."

"No, it isn't your attic and you were company," answered Elizabeth, settling that question.

"Don't you think you can come now?" asked Betsy. "I have some lovely pieces. Aunt Emily let me bring a piece bag, and it is a rainy day, you know."

This quite decided Elizabeth to put an end to her punishment, and she came forth with alacrity, eager to see what Betsy had brought.

“Aunt Emily was really very good about it,” said Betsy, following her friend to the playroom. “She said you were very generous to let me use your idea for a scent bag and she liked my making it for Miss Jewett. She said to tell you that you were to have any pieces from this bag.”

“I think that is mighty kind of her,” said Elizabeth, well pleased at this reward of virtue.

“Have you any new ideas?” asked Betsy anxiously, still feeling that she was a little selfish to take advantage of Elizabeth’s ingenuity.

“I have two lovely ones,” replied Elizabeth; “at least they are not mine but they are things Kathie showed me, and if I have the materials she will show me how to make them.”

“Shall you make them both?” inquired Betsy.

“That depends. They are both so nice I don’t know which to choose.”

“Tell me about them.”

“One is for handkerchiefs. You cover two squares of pasteboard cut a little larger than a folded hand-

kerchief and cover both sides, one with any pretty piece of silk and the other side with white, then you have a strap of elastic to hold them together when you put the handkerchiefs inside. It doesn't muss the handkerchiefs, takes up no room and makes it very handy for you to see just what you want when you are looking for a handkerchief."

"I should think that would be very nice," declared Betsy. "Now what is the other one?"

"It is a case for threaded needles. You take a piece of ribbon about so long,"—Elizabeth measured with her two hands a distance of a little less than three quarters of a yard,—"and about so wide,"—she measured again about three and a half inches. "You sew one end over a piece of pasteboard the length of the longest needle you intend to have and you fasten in a strip of flannel not quite so long as the ribbon and a little narrower, then you thread needles with black silk and cotton and white silk and cotton; you run them in and out the flannel, fold the ribbon over and over, tie it together with a little narrow ribbon and when you are in a great hurry or when you are travelling you don't have to stop to thread needles."

"I think that is fine," returned Betsy, who had listened attentively. "I believe I would like that better than the scent bag."

Elizabeth made no reply. She really liked it better herself and had quite a feeling of triumph that she had found something so simple and yet so useful. But it would take quite a length of ribbon and she was not at all sure she could find a piece exactly suited. "Kathie says she has some flannel I can use," she remarked after awhile, "if only I can get the ribbon. I suppose I could save up and buy it, but I haven't a great deal of time to save in, for Christmas comes very soon after Thanksgiving, and the pennies don't come in as fast as the days fly by. Besides, I need all I can get to buy what I most want to get for mother."

Betsy was absorbed in peeping into the bag she held, and began to draw forth one piece after another. Elizabeth watched her with interest. "There," she exclaimed, pouncing upon a bit of delicately flowered silk, "that would just do for the scent bag. Isn't it pretty?" she added, holding it up. "Shall you use that?" she asked.

"If I don't see anything I like better," answered

Betsy. "This might do for your handkerchief case," she went on, as she laid two ends of silk in Elizabeth's lap. They were not very pretty pieces, Elizabeth thought, and she looked at them doubtfully. Miss Jewett should have only the very loveliest, she considered. "Maybe we can find something else," said Betsy, noticing Elizabeth's expression.

"These are rather dark," said Elizabeth, brightening.

Betsy began diving deeper into the bag. Presently she drew forth a fluttering end but quickly thrust it back again, giving a keen glance at Elizabeth as she did so and murmuring: "Oh, that wouldn't do," and she fumbled again among the pieces. Presently she brought forth from the collection a very pretty piece of delicate blue silk sprinkled with tiny bunches of flowers. "How would you like this?" she asked as she laid it in Elizabeth's lap.

"Oh, that is perfectly lovely!" cried Elizabeth. "But wouldn't it be big enough for your bag, Betsy?"

"Maybe, but I think I can find something else, or I can take the other, the first one, if you like this best."

"Oh, I do like it best of anything, and I think you

are very generous to let me have it. I am going to run down and show it to Kathie and get her to measure, though I am sure there will be loads to make it the right size." She ran off, saying as she went, "I'll be right back, Betsy." She had been a little disappointed that Betsy had not emptied the contents of the bag that they might both look them over together, but she did not think of this now that she was so entirely satisfied with what had been given her.

No sooner was she out of sight than Betsy hastily drew out the end which she had thrust back and held it up, a very rich and beautiful length of ribbon. "It is the very prettiest yet," murmured Betsy. She reached over and took Elizabeth's little tape-measure from the work-basket which stood on the chair near by. She measured the ribbon; it was just three and a half inches wide and lacked a little of being three quarters of a yard in length. "It is exactly right," said Betsy to herself. "I cannot let her have it. After all I ought to let her give the scent bag because it was her idea, and besides if I give her the silk for it and don't take any of the dried leaves I will really be very generous."

Still she did not feel exactly comfortable as she smoothed out the ribbon on her lap and finally, at the sound of Elizabeth's approach, stuffed it down into the very bottom of the bag, nor did she feel any happier when Elizabeth said: "Kathie says you are a dear. She thinks this is lovely and it is big enough for either a scent bag or the handkerchief case. I really think you ought to have it, Betsy."

But Betsy shook her head. "No, I don't want it. You must take it."

"Well, I am sure I am a thousand times obliged to you," said Elizabeth. "See, I have brought up the little thread and needle case for you to see how easy it will be to make; anyone could do it."

Betsy took the proffered article in her hand and examined it carefully. Yes, anyone could make it, that was quite true. She thought of the ribbon in the depths of the bag and tried to feel pleased. "Wouldn't you really like to make a scent bag better than anything else for Miss Jewett?" she asked. "Tell me truly, Elizabeth, if you had your choice which of the three things would you rather give her? Tell me truly. Cross your heart."

Elizabeth went through the ceremony of crossing her heart. "Well, if I had just the very handsomest piece of ribbon, I believe I would rather give her the thread and needle case than anything else, because she would probably use it oftener than the bag."

"Not oftener than she would the handkerchief case. She would think of you every time she saw that, you know."

"So she would. Well then, I should like to make both."

"I don't think that is fair," said Betsy. "It isn't fair for you to give her two presents when I have only one, unless my one were very, very handsome."

"But you wanted the scent bag; you know you did, Betsy."

"I didn't say I didn't want it, did I? Besides, you know you haven't the ribbon to make the needle and thread case even if you wanted to."

"No, I know I haven't, but we were talking of what we would like best to give, not what we really were able to. Have you decided upon what you will take for your scent bag?"

"No, and I don't think I will decide today.

Maybe aunt Emily will come across some more pieces. I wouldn't begin on the handkerchief case yet, Elizabeth."

"Why not? It is such a nice rainy day, and Kathie is at home to show me just how, and you know we said we would begin the first rainy day so as to get them done in time."

Betsy looked uneasy. "I'm not going to begin mine," she declared.

"Oh, please, Betsy."

Betsy shook her head.

"I know just why you aren't going to," Elizabeth asserted; "it is because you have given me the nicest piece and the only one that will do, and you are too generous to say so. You have just got to take it back and I will use that dark one."

Betsy backed away as Elizabeth tried to force the silk upon her. "I will not have it," she maintained. "I am not an Indian giver; besides, aunt Emily said that you were to have anything in the bag you wanted." Betsy had a sharp pang of conscience as she made this speech, remembering what was hidden in the depths of the bag on her arm. "I must really go, Elizabeth."

"But it is early and I did think we would have such a good time."

"I will come some other time." Betsy hesitated before continuing: "I wish you would put off doing yours, too. There is no telling what we may get after another hunt."

"But I couldn't have anything better than this," returned Elizabeth, giving the blue silk an admiring look, "not if I searched the world over."

"You'd better wait," repeated Betsy and then she went off, leaving Elizabeth feeling somewhat mystified and rather disappointed.

As soon as Betsy reached home she went to her room and drew forth the coveted bit of ribbon. Yes, it was even more beautiful than she thought. She had never seen anything of the kind that she admired as much. Suppose her aunt Emily had made a mistake in putting it in that special bag, or suppose she should say that she had missed it and wanted to use it herself. Even if she might have it her aunt would question as to her use of it.

This Miss Emily did when, a little later, Betsy went to her. "Could I have this, aunt Emily?" she asked, producing the piece of ribbon. "It was in the

piece bag and you said we could have any thing in it."

"Then if I said so I must keep my word," replied Miss Emily. "It is a very pretty piece of ribbon. What do you intend to do with it?"

Betsy paused before she answered: "Elizabeth showed me a very nice thread and needle case; I thought I would like to make one for Christmas."

"Whom would you give it to? It is such a very handsome piece of ribbon you should not waste it on merely anyone."

"I thought I would give it to Miss Jewett."

"What about the scent bag? I thought you had decided upon that and that Elizabeth was to share her gathered sweets with you."

Betsy was silent before she said: "That was Elizabeth's own idea and I think she ought to be allowed to keep it."

Miss Emily smiled approbation. "In that case, as a reward for your generosity in giving up the more personal and original gift, I must certainly allow you to have the ribbon."

Betsy walked away feeling ashamed instead of happy at receiving approval for something which

she knew she did not quite deserve. She laid the ribbon carefully away but she did not forget it.

Whether it was the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," whether it was a sermon upon the subject of petty deceits or whether it was her own tender conscience is not certain, but there was a reason somewhere which made Betsy very miserable all the next day, not that her excuse in keeping the ribbon was not a perfectly proper one, but because she had pretended to a different motive from the real one, and she knew she had received praise where no praise was due. She wished she had never seen the ribbon; she wished thread and needle cases had never been invented; she almost wished there were no Christmas.

CHAPTER IV

ON MONDAY

BETSY, who was always most eager to greet Elizabeth on Monday mornings at school, did not feel very enthusiastic about it on this present occasion; Elizabeth was sure to hark back to the subject of Christmas gifts; it was like her to be interested in one thing to the exclusion of all others until the matter had been well threshed out, unless something much more exciting occurred to put it out of her mind, so Betsy, instead of hurrying off as usual to school, lagged behind, giving no answer to the call which Elizabeth and Bess gave as they passed by together, and arriving just at the very last stroke of the bell. Elizabeth looked up beamingly as she entered and gave Betsy's hand an affectionate squeeze when her desk-mate took the seat by her side; but Betsy's face wore such a solemn expression that Elizabeth looked at her inquiringly, receiving no response to her questioning glance.

When the hour for recess came Elizabeth's first question was: "Aren't you well, Betsy? Has anything happened?"

Betsy shook her head. "No, I feel cross; that is all."

"Then here is something to sweeten your disposition," returned Elizabeth laughingly. "I got up early and made some fudge with marshmallows in it. I brought this boxful to you; it is all for yourself, because you were so dear and generous about the silk pieces."

Again! Betsy felt that she could not stand it much longer. "Bother the silk pieces," she cried. "I wish you would stop talking about them."

"Well, you are cross, sure enough," said Elizabeth, really feeling hurt at this reception of her gift. "You'd better eat a piece of fudge and see if it won't do you good."

But Betsy left the fudge untouched and had very little to say during luncheon. When Bess rallied her upon her silence Elizabeth shook her head and whispered to Bess: "Don't tease her; I don't believe she feels well."

That her first best friend did not resent her ill

temper was the crowning stroke, and before school closed Betsy gave in. She slipped a little note into Elizabeth's hand, addressing her in the style they adopted toward one another on such occasions, and asking that Elizabeth would meet her at their trysting place that afternoon. If she were not there Elizabeth was to look for a message left in the usual secret place.

Nothing pleased Elizabeth more than such messages. She was usually the one to take the initiative and to bid Betsy to the trysting place; it had been some time since either of them had made an excuse for such a meeting and it was therefore the keener prospect. Elizabeth did not delay in reaching the spot, but found no Betsy. She hastened to the big stone, looked under it and found a small package wrapped in heavy paper and securely sealed. Wondering what it could contain, Elizabeth broke the seals and found inside the heavy paper another wrapping of soft white paper which she unfastened — to find inside a length of beautiful ribbon and a note; the note read:

DEAREST FREDERICA, — This ribbon is for you. I have a confession to make about it. I was meanly going to keep

it for myself. It was in the bag I brought to your house and I found it and did not tell you nor show it to you because I was a pig and didn't want you to have it. You thought I was generous when I was a mean, mean, selfish, disgusting creature. Now I shall not be happy till you take it for I cannot stand your thinking me generous when I was not. If you forgive me run up the flag and I will come and fall at your feet, crying, "*Peccavi*," and throwing myself on your mercy. If you do not forgive me I shall be heart-broken.

Your sinful and contrite,

PHILLIPA.

Elizabeth read the note over several times before she quite took in its meaning, then she hurried to a hollow tree, drew forth a small tin box and took out a white flag. This she fastened to a long pole hidden in the bushes and, lifting it, waved it slowly back and forth. This was what the two girls called running up the flag.

Betsy was on the watch, and as soon as she caught sight of the waving banner she hurried down the garden path, out the side gate, and in a few minutes was in Elizabeth's presence. She wore a black shawl draped about her small person and a short veil fell over her face. She could have taken no surer way of appealing to Elizabeth than by such dress. Arriving at the spot where Elizabeth waited, Betsy

dropped upon her knees and stretched out her arms in an attitude of despairing entreaty.

"Do not kneel to unworthy me, fair lady!" began Elizabeth. "Rise and come to my heart. Who am I that you should kneel to me?"

For answer, Betsy, still on her knees, moved nearer and humbly kissed Elizabeth's hand. "Your gentle heart forgives a suffering culprit?" she murmured.

"There is no question of forgiveness between the Lady Phillipa and her adoring Frederica," answered Elizabeth. Then Betsy fell on her neck and the two rapturously embraced. After which Elizabeth held off her friend to look at her admiringly. "What a fine costume," she commented. "How did you ever think of it?"

"I found the old black shawl up in the attic, and the veil is one that aunt Emily had thrown away. I cut off the holey part," Betsy told her.

"It makes a perfect penitential dress," declared Elizabeth. "But, Betsy, I am not going to take that ribbon. I won't, I won't, I won't. After your giving me that lovely blue I would like to know who would be the pig if I accepted both. Besides, you must

have wanted it awfully yourself. Honest now, didn't you?"

Driven to a corner, Betsy had to acknowledge facts. "Of course, or I wouldn't have been so mean about it."

"I don't call it mean. You have a perfect right to it, a much better right than I have."

"It isn't that I haven't the right, I suppose," replied Betsy gravely; "it is because I deceived you and aunt Emily and allowed you to think I was generous when I wasn't. I wanted the ribbon to make the thread and needle case much more than I did anything to make a scent bag."

"Well, but don't you remember that you said it would be no fair if I gave two presents and you only one, unless yours should be much handsomer. Of course we have to say that this is much handsomer, so if you like it best why not let me make a scent bag out of the blue flowery piece, a handkerchief case out of something else, and you take this?"

"Would you really truly just as lief?" said Betsy, still finding her ardent desire for the ribbon unquenched.

"Of course I would. I couldn't possibly bring

myself to gobble up the two very prettiest pieces in the whole lot, and if I have one and you the other that will make it just right, don't you see?"

"Oh, Elizabeth, you are a dear, yet still I don't feel quite right about it."

"You are supersensitive," said Elizabeth, pleased at being able to air a word which she had heard her sister use that morning.

Betsy was a little awed by it, as she always was by any addition to Elizabeth's vocabulary. Elizabeth always used new, important-sounding words with such glibness and in such an assured manner, though many times she did not get them just right. "Aunt Emily likes the idea of the scent bag," said Betsy, a little uncertain yet.

"Then, I'll tell you what," said Elizabeth, ready with an answering argument. "I promised you some of my dried stuff in exchange for silk pieces, didn't I?"

Betsy was obliged to acknowledge this was true.

"Well, then, I wouldn't be keeping my part of the bargain unless I did it, so you take some and make a scent bag for your aunt Em. I have another idea; if you don't like to use the pieces she is acquainted

with you can get Kathie to change with you; she has some real pretty ones, so Miss Emily will have something quite a novelty to her."

"Oh, Elizabeth, what a very nice plan," said Betsy, now thoroughly convinced. "I do think you can think out the nicest things. I should like to do that."

"I almost hope next Saturday will be rainy, don't you?" said Elizabeth as, with arms around one another, they walked towards the garden gate.

"I almost do," agreed Betsy, "though I usually despise rainy days. Come in and let us go up to my room and look over the bag together; you must have another choice, you know, and I will choose something to swap with Kathie; you are sure she will be willing to, Elizabeth."

"Of course she will. It will be much more interesting to have a variety."

Betsy was satisfied with this assurance, and thus all clouds rolled away.

It was too dark for Elizabeth to linger long, but each made her choice from the stuffs which Betsy shook out upon her bed, and then Elizabeth, with hers safely tucked in her coat pocket, started up the long street towards the brown house at the end of it.

There was a comforting odor of supper when Elizabeth entered, and she made straight for the kitchen that she might discover what Electra was cooking.

"Now, what are you after?" inquired Electra, as she quickly shut the oven door.

"I wanted to know what it was that smelled so good," returned Elizabeth.

"I'll be bound for you," returned Electra. "It is filoës for meddlers, if you must know."

This was always Electra's answer when she was making something which she meant as a surprise, and Elizabeth's curiosity was aroused. She sniffed the air, saying: "If I guess what it is will you tell me?"

Electra smiled grimly. "I'll give you three guesses, and if you don't guess right you can just clear out."

"It has a sort of cakey smell, and yet it doesn't smell exactly like gingerbread," said Elizabeth contemplatively. "I suppose it isn't ginger muffins."

"If that's a guess," returned Electra, "I'm free to say it ain't."

"I didn't think it was," returned Elizabeth, "so I am not going to call it a guess."

“Then what was it?”

“Oh, just a — a sort of side remark.”

Electra laughed. “Hurry up, or I’ll shoo you out without any guesses.”

“Then I’ll guess rusk, hot rusks.”

“Wrong.”

“Then — then, maybe it is French rolls; I hope it is, for I dearly like them.”

“You won’t have your appetite pampered by them this night, although I don’t believe you’ll refuse what is in the oven.”

“Let me see,” Elizabeth reflected. “I shall have to think very hard for this is my last go.” She looked around the kitchen. “It is not anything you cut out, for you are not using the biscuit board.” She went over to the sink where stood some dishes which Electra had set there to wash. Elizabeth regarded them earnestly. “That bowl looks as if it might have had muffins stirred up in it,” remarked Elizabeth, “though,” she added hastily, “that isn’t a guess, ’Lectra.”

“It is just another side remark, I suppose,” returned Electra.

Elizabeth opened the door of one of the cupboards

and looked in. "It can't be muffins," she said, "for there are the muffin pans."

"Well, now, ain't you smart?" declared Electra. "Who but you would have thought of that? Now turn your back and don't peep while I'm looking in the oven again."

Elizabeth obeyed. "I can use my nose if I can't my eyes." She made the remark sniffing thoughtfully. "Oh, Electra, I believe I can guess with my nose; it is Sally Lunn."

"Well, now, ain't you got a good nose; that's just what it is," Electra told her. "We ain't had any in a long time, and as the bread had give out with so much extra company over Sunday, I thought I'd stir some up this morning. Being wash day, I couldn't do a regular baking."

"I'm mighty glad you couldn't, for Sally Lunn is much better than bread or rolls or anything like that. Is it most done, Electra?" Elizabeth peeped over the woman's shoulder as she tested the browning cakes.

"Not quite, but pretty near. You run in and get me a plate while I take up this ham; then you can sound the gong, for I reckon by the time they all collect we shall be ready."

Elizabeth ran off with alacrity. She enjoyed helping Electra but was not always permitted to, for Electra was cranky and as she had been with the family a long time and was an excellent servant, her peculiar moods were overlooked and the children were not allowed to bother when she was cross.

“Please let me take it in,” Elizabeth begged. “Let’s wait till they are all at the table; it will be so much more of a surprise that way.”

Electra was ready to humor her and allowed her to bear in a well-piled plate in triumph, Elizabeth announcing with an air of having planned the whole thing “See, what a surprise I’ve brought.”

“Humph! You didn’t make it,” said Bert scornfully.

“I don’t care if I didn’t; I knew about it and that is more than you did. Bah!” returned Elizabeth.

“Here, here, don’t let us have any squabbling,” said Mr. Hollins. “That is not the sort of sauce we want to season a good supper.” And the two children subsided, being the more ready to do so since they did not want to waste any time in beginning their meal.

CHAPTER V

THE THEMES

ELIZABETH'S little sister Babs was singing energetically as she played a pretended accompaniment on the sofa:

“Wild rose and Injun girl, bright alapaca,
Where sweeps the waters of the blue Jumiaca.”

She had caught this from Electra. She knew there were wild roses and she had heard of alpaca; so she put the words together as they sounded to her, though they did not convey much meaning.

Elizabeth, in a big chair by the window, giggled. Babs looked up indignantly and stopped her performance. “What you laughing at?” she asked.

“I’m laughing at you,” replied Elizabeth; “you are singing that in such a funny way.”

“I’m not at all,” contradicted Babs. “It is wild rose and Injun girl and alpaca,—’Lectra knows. She’s got a alpaca dress, too; she showed it to me.”

Elizabeth for answer laughed the more, to Babs's great discomfiture. "What is it, then, if you know so much?" she said.

"It is:

'Wild roved an Indian girl, bright Alfarata,
Where sweep the waters of the blue Juniata.'"

Babs pondered over this for a moment; it did not seem half as intelligible to her as her own way of singing it. "I'm going to ask 'Lectra,'" she said, finally, and flounced out of the room. Babs was a tempestuous little body who flew into rages at small provocation. She was much more practical than Elizabeth and often showed her contempt for her sister's fancies. Her favorite doll was a very plain, inartistic creature to whom was given the unlovely name of Jim Dumps. Babs was seldom seen without Jim Dumps in her arms, sitting by her side or near enough to be spoken to and consulted upon any subject. Babs always took him to bed with her and he had his own seat in a small chair in the dining-room. He did not wear big boy's attire but was seen in dresses to which was added a sacque, a shawl, a scarf, or anything which happened to appeal to the

mood of his small mother. His face bore the marks and ravages of time; he had been repainted more than once, and was by no means beautiful, yet Babs loved him with a faithfulness which was almost pathetic. Mrs. Hollins had made the mistake upon the Christmas before of substituting another doll of the same size for battered-up Jim Dumps and had put him out of the way in the furthest corner of a closet, telling Babs he had gone away, and hoping she would forget him in time. Babs tried to console herself with the new doll, but one day, when she was playing bear and the dark closet was her den, she rooted out the old familiar body of her favorite and went shrieking with delight to her mother.

"Muvver, muvver," she cried, "what do you sink I've found? My darling old Jim Dumps. He's comed back! He's comed back!" And Mrs. Hollins had not the heart ever to hide him again.

Elizabeth had not given up playing with dolls, but her favorite was a lovely being named the Lady Adelaide. She figured in many a romance, sometimes reaching the dignity of a throne, and sometimes being obliged to earn her living by singing in the streets. Paper dolls, however, afforded Elizabeth more amuse-

ment and she was always eager for the first choice of the colored plates in a fashion magazine. Over these she and Babs had many a squabble, for Elizabeth was still so much of a child as to consider these playthings very important and could not see why she should give up to Babs, so at last Mrs. Hollins had to make the rule that Elizabeth was to have the pages of one periodical and Babs the other.

After Babs had taken her departure from the room where she had been singing "Bright Alfarata," Elizabeth returned to her book. Presently she gave a long sigh which attracted her mother's attention.

"What is it, daughter?" she asked. "That was a very big sigh for a little girl."

"I am thinking about my weekly theme," returned Elizabeth, and I can't make up my mind which to write about — lynxes or daddy-long-legs."

"Those seem to me rather queer subjects," said Mrs. Hollins, looking puzzled. "Did Miss Jewett give them to you?"

"Oh no, I thought of them myself. She said not to take any ordinary thing, like Spring or Happiness or such to write subjects, but to try to be original."

"Just what do you mean by 'to write subjects'?" asked Mrs. Hollins.

"Why, subjects to write about, I suppose; that is what Miss Jewett said: 'to write subjects.'"

Mrs. Hollins laughed. "I suspect you haven't quite the right idea. There is such a word as trite. You go and look it up in the dictionary and see if you don't think it is the word Miss Jewett used."

Elizabeth obeyed, bringing the big dictionary and opening it before her on the window-seat. She turned over the pages, murmuring to herself, "t-o-t — t-r-a — t-r-i, — here it is. 'Trite, worn out; stale; common.' Of course that was what she meant. I'm glad you explained it, mother. Lynxes or daddy-long-legs wouldn't be trite, would they?"

"Far from it! How did you happen to select them? Do you know anything about either one?"

Elizabeth shook her head. "Not a thing, but I am rather interested in them and I thought the best way to learn about them would be to write about them, for then I'd have to find out something."

"That is one way of looking at it, certainly rather an original one for a little girl. How do you happen to be interested in these two creatures?"

"Why, you know Neal Paine shot a lynx down by the woods back of the Paines's house. I saw it."

"Yes, I remember that he did and it made quite a stir in the neighborhood. Some persons thought it must have escaped from some travelling show and others said it probably made its way down from Canada, for they do not belong to these parts."

"That's what Betsy's uncle said. He said they used to be in the wild forests, but that as the country was settled up they went further north, where it was not so civilized. He thought this one might have a mate. I shouldn't like to meet it on a dark night, should you, mother?"

"I must say I should not. What do you know about the daddy-long-legs? It seems to me they are funny things for you to take an interest in. Most persons would be afraid of them."

"I'm not afraid of anything but caterpillars and creepy things, wormy ones. Betsy and I had a pet daddy at her house. We used to feed it on ginger-bread crumbs and it would let itself down in the middle and pick up the crumbs with its two forepaws."

Mrs. Hollins laughed. "I didn't know daddies had paws."

"Well, whatever they are; those little short things like claws that they use to pick up things with."

"How did you become acquainted with your daddy?"

"He used to come every day and gallop around the round table in Betsy's room. I think he liked the bowl of nasturtiums she had there, for when he got tired of galloping he would go and curl himself up in the flowers."

"What made you think it was always the same creature?"

"Because he had a feeler gone. We think he lost it in a fight, for one day we saw two daddies fighting and they fought like anything. They have such very, very thin legs and feelers, finer than thread, so it would be very easy for an enemy to pull one off."

"What became of your daddy?"

"He committed suicide," answered Elizabeth with perfect gravity.

"Why, Elizabeth, I do think that is going a little too far. You are a little too imaginative when you get started sometimes."

"But, mother, he really did. He walked right into the open fire in Betsy's room; we saw him do it. We didn't know whether he did it because he was unhappy or because he thought it was a bright and beautiful palace that he was going into; anyhow he destroyed himself, for we saw him and we were too late to pull him back from danger. We really missed him very much."

"Well, my dear, I think if you were to write just what you have told me it would make a very good theme and I wouldn't bother about lynxes this time."

"Oh, but I would like to. I might take the daddy first and the lynx the next time, then I would have a chance to learn more about lynxes. I really do want to find out a little more about daddies, and I am going to look them up in a encycellopedia."

"Not quite so many syllables in that word," cautioned her mother. "It is encyclopædia. I think the daddies belong to the spider family, and you can probably find out about them in the volume which has the article on spiders."

"We called him Stilty," Elizabeth informed her mother, "because he looked just as if he were walking on stilts."

"That was a very good name," agreed her mother. "I think you have material enough for a very good theme, so you'd better go ahead and write it while it is fresh in your mind."

"I must hunt up spiders in the encyclopædia first," said Elizabeth, and was soon poring over the article she wanted.

She did not say anything to Betsy about her theme, but to her great joy it was a success, for Miss Jewett praised it before the whole school. "I am going to read you the most original theme which has been handed in," she told her pupils. "I want you to see how easy it is to find interesting subjects close at hand. One doesn't have to go to Europe to find originality, doesn't have to hunt in Africa to discover something unfamiliar. You will all laugh when I tell you this is the story of Stilty, a Daddy-long-legs, and I can assure you I smiled when I read the title, but it told me things I didn't know and so I am sure it will you."

A snicker did go around the schoolroom, but the title sounded promising and the children listened with their best attention. Elizabeth sat with eyes cast down, feeling very proud, yet a trifle embar-

rassed. Never before had she been so honored as to have a writing of hers read in public. No doubt Miss Jewett did not want her to feel too much puffed up, for when she had finished reading she said: "Of course this is by no means a model theme, for there are faults in spelling and punctuation, and you would find a great deal to correct if you were to criticise it. I commend it simply for its originality."

When the paper was handed back to Elizabeth she did find plenty of red pencil marks which called her attention to mistakes, but she was quite exalted, nevertheless, and Betsy was not long in making it known that no one but Elizabeth could have written the theme.

"Oh, Elizabeth," she said, as they walked home together, "I am so proud of you, and to think you took our poor little Stilty and made such a fine story of him. Why couldn't I have thought of it? It happened in my own room and I knew it just as well as you, but I wasn't smart enough to find out what a good story it would make."

"I wasn't quite sure whether it would be best to take that or another subject," Elizabeth told her, "but when I told mother about Stilty she advised

me to write about him, and now I am glad I did."

"What was the other?"

"I am not going to tell," returned Elizabeth, "for I may not use it after all."

"I think you might tell me," said Betsy coaxingly, "then if you don't use it I can."

"If I don't use it I will tell you," replied Elizabeth, and this was the most that Betsy could get her to promise.

Whatever else the theme did it certainly started a fancy for familiar subjects. For the next month or two the gamut was run from crickets to turkey-gobblers, so that when the lynx tale did appear it did not make the sensation of Elizabeth's first theme, and, in fact, was not so good, as it did not relate personal experience. Betsy wrote a funny story about a toad; Bess presented a deadly uninteresting and commonplace theme about a field-mouse, and it became quite the fashion for the boys and girls to watch the movements of insects, birds, and small animals, so that if Elizabeth did nothing else, she started up an interest in natural history and became an unconscious influence for good, since the children

were much more ready than before to protect the little creatures with whom they were beginning to become acquainted.

To be sure the winter was setting in and there was not much animal life to observe, but the very rarity of it gave more interest. A cricket under the hearth, a bird which had lingered longer than usual before making its migration, a Molly Cottontail, a conovation of crows, all these were noted and commented upon. As the boys and girls came and went along the country roads they were alert for any unusual movement in the bushes or sound in the fields.

“What would you do if you met a wild beast?” asked Bert, one day, as he and his sister trudged home.

“I’d run,” replied Elizabeth laconically.

“Pooh! that wouldn’t do any good for it could run faster than you could.”

“Then I’d climb a tree.”

“Suppose it could climb, too; lots of wild beasts can, bears and panthers and wild-cats can.”

“They say if you turn and look a wild beast straight in the eye it will turn and slink away,” said Elizabeth.

"I wouldn't like to try it," returned Bert; "it might pounce on you while you were getting ready, and if it were dark it would not do any good."

"Most wild beasts can see in the dark," Elizabeth made answer. "I read of a man once who met some sort of wild beast and he couldn't get away quickly enough so he just leaned over and looked at it between his legs; it scared the creature so that it ran away, for it didn't recognize the strange-looking thing that was before it."

"That was a good idea," agreed Bert, at once beginning to practice this feat. "I could do that, but you couldn't very well, because you have skirts on."

Elizabeth admitted that this was a serious drawback but thought if one always carried an umbrella with a hideous face painted on and opened it suddenly it might serve as good a purpose. "I believe I will hunt up an old umbrella and paint a face on it, or I could get Kathie to do it for me or Miss Jewett could do it beautifully."

"It wouldn't do much good in the dark," objected Bert.

"If it were done with that shining sort of stuff that they use for match safes and things it would be

very horrible," declared Elizabeth. "I would always carry it at night and one done with plain paint in the daytime."

Bert thought this might do very well for a girl. "But I would carry a gun," he declared; "then I could shoot in a minute."

"They used to do that way in old times when there were Indians prowling about: they carried their guns to church so if they were attacked by wolves or Indians on the way they could defend their families, but father wouldn't let you carry a gun to school, Bert."

It was broad daylight and there did not appear to be much necessity for such a precaution, so Bert laughed. "I reckon I shan't need one in this neighborhood," he said.

"You never know what may happen," returned Elizabeth, giving rein to her imagination.

CHAPTER VI

SCARED

FOR once Elizabeth's imagination did not lead her very far astray, as was shown a few days later. She had mentioned the subject of the painted umbrella to her sister Kathie but met with such mocking laughter that she did not follow out her intention of mentioning it to Miss Jewett, too.

"I declare, Elizabeth, you do have the craziest ideas," said Kathie. "One would suppose we lived in the backwoods. Who ever heard of anyone's being attacked by wild animals around here? There may be a fox or two away off in the far woods, but that is all. You're not afraid of cows, are you? You'll not meet anything worse on the road, I can assure you."

Elizabeth felt a trifle ashamed of her fancies but answered, "Bess is afraid of cows and goats and things with horns."

"Well, you needn't be," replied Kathie. "This

all comes of the wild stories you children have been writing. I think you'd better stop it. You are such a notional, emotional sort of child that you are carried beyond all reason once you get started on a subject. I think you had better let up on 'Wild Animals I Have Known.'"

"They weren't all wild animals," returned Elizabeth, ready to argue; "only a very few were. Crickets aren't wild, are they?"

"Would you call them tame?" laughed Kathie.

"They don't bite nor sting," continued Elizabeth. "Maybe you could call field-mice wild. Besides, I don't mean harmless wild animals, I mean fierce things like wild-cats and bears."

"One would suppose you were no older than Babs — to be afraid of bears." Kathie was scornful. "I suppose you imagine one might scramble up the stairs after you in the dark. You are like the baby in the picture."

To be called a baby, a great girl like herself, so grown up as to have her theme read before a listening public, was too much for Elizabeth and she came to the conclusion that she was rather foolish and that there would never be the slightest need for

a face-painted umbrella. So she walked away and gave up the idea.

It all came back to her that very evening, however, for when she came home from school her mother called her. "Elizabeth, I wonder if you couldn't take some milk down to Mrs. Traill's. Her baby is not well and their cow has gone dry, so I promised her I would let her have some."

"Can't Bert take it?" said Elizabeth, having other matters in mind.

"He is not here; your father sent him on an errand as soon as he came in from school. It won't take you long and it isn't dark yet. After this Mrs. Traill will arrange to send for it, but she cannot today. You would do that much for a little sick baby, wouldn't you?"

This reproof appealed to Elizabeth at once, so without saying another word she picked up the tin can her mother had set down for her and started off. The way to Mrs. Traill's was down a long hill at the foot of which was a little bridge. Just beyond this was Mrs. Traill's small house. She was a poor woman with two or three small children. She had lately become a widow and was struggling hard to

make both ends meet. Mrs. Hollins often employed her and showed her many neighborly kindnesses.

Elizabeth did not mind the walk down hill, and soon reached the house, giving her mother's message and taking pains to inquire after the baby. Receiving the can back again after it was emptied, the little girl started home, determining to stop just beyond the bridge to gather some chestnuts which she had seen on the ground under a big tree. She had passed the bridge and was just about to creep under the bars which led into the field when she saw something which at first she mistook for a large dog. She was not usually afraid of dogs but this had an unfamiliar look so she backed away to give it a second scrutiny. The creature advanced. Elizabeth's eyes grew bigger and bigger, then, shrieking, she started up the hill, the animal, inside the fence, loping along keeping pace with her. The hill was long and steep, but the child flew along panting, screaming, once in awhile casting fearful looks at the beast which did not attempt to leap the stone wall between them. All sorts of thoughts flashed through Elizabeth's mind. She wished for the umbrella of her fancy; she wished that Bert was

there with his gun; she wondered if she could scare off the creature by a fixed gaze. This last took more courage than she possessed, but she decided that she must try to drive it off in some way as her breath was giving out and she had still some distance to go before the top of the hill and the turn in the road should be reached. What could she do? Pausing a second she hurled the empty can at her enemy and, gathering energy for a final spurt, she fled on.

Before this her cries had reached the ears of the blacksmith whose shop was the first building at the top of the hill. It was to him that Bert had been sent on an errand, and he, too, heard the shrieks, but had no idea it was his sister who was in trouble.

"Hallo, what's the matter?" cried Jim Powers, the blacksmith. "Why, Bert, it's your sister," he exclaimed, and in another moment had raced to meet the little girl, Bert not far behind him.

"Here, here, what's the trouble, sissy?" said Jim, kneeling down and putting his arm around the frightened child. "There, don't cry, tell us all about it. Anybody hurt? What's wrong?"

Having reached safety Elizabeth had only sobs

for reply, but presently gathered voice to say, "It's there! It's there! A great big terrible animal."

"Where is it?" Jim asked.

"Down — down there in the field. It followed me and I threw the can at it."

"Well, well, I wouldn't be scared," said Jim soothingly; "I reckon it isn't anything worse than a dog."

"Oh, but it is." Elizabeth was regaining her courage. "I thought it was a dog at first, but I know it isn't; I am sure it is a lynx."

"By gum, you don't say so," returned Jim. "Run home, Bert, and tell your father to bring his gun. I haven't mine at the shop and he's the next nearest. We'll see to this."

Bert did not need a second bidding but was off like a shot, going full tilt up the road towards his own house. He shouted out his news to those he met on the way. "I say, there's a big wild animal down in the hollow by the bridge; we're going to shoot it." We? Of course "we." Should not the prowess of the father be shared by the son?

By the time Mr. Hollins with his rifle and his attendant squire, Bert, had arrived at the scene of action quite a crowd had gathered.

Elizabeth and Jim Powers were first on the ground, Elizabeth keeping very close to Jim and glancing fearfully around; for up to this time the animal had not been discovered. There was a great deal of excited talk, much beating around in the bushes, and some chaff.

“Don’t let it bite you, Bill,” said one big fellow to another who was on his knees, looking under the bars; and when Bill drew away his head suddenly there was a shout of laughter.

“Where do you suppose he’s got to?” said Jim. “How big was he, sissy?”

“Oh, he looked awfully big; as big as a bear,” Elizabeth told him.

“We’ll take a few inches off and allow him to be as big as a calf,” responded Jim. “Have to make allowance for your size and likewise for the size of your scare.”

“Sure you saw anything at all?” queried the man they called Bill.

“I should think I did,” returned Elizabeth, “when it followed me almost to the top of the hill.”

Bert, who began to have doubts, since there was nothing strange to be seen, felt a little ashamed at

having brought the men there to no purpose and was inclined to mock his sister. "I guess you dreamed it," he said. "I don't believe there was anything at all but a dog. It's just like you, Elizabeth, to get up an excitement all for nothing."

Elizabeth began to wish that something to frighten her brother really might appear. "I reckon if you had seen what I did, and had been as near to it you wouldn't say it was imagination," she said indignantly.

"It could easy get away before this," said Jim, giving countenance to Elizabeth's story.

"Where was it you saw it first, sis?" inquired Bill.

"Right here," Elizabeth began. "I was going to pick up some chestnuts—" She paused suddenly and pointed with shaking finger to a wild apple-tree overhanging the road. "There it is! There! There!" she cried, her voice quavering with excitement. "Oh run, run, Bert, it might spring on you," — for Bert was nearest to the tree.

"Well, I'll be switched if she ain't right," cried Jim, "for if there ain't the blamed crittur up on that there appletree."

There was instant commotion, which proved

that Elizabeth was justified in her fears, for, sure enough, lying along a limb, switching its short tail and gazing down at its enemies, was a great lynx, a fearsome enough beast to alarm a less timid person than Elizabeth.

There was the sudden sharp crack of a rifle, the sound of a falling body, then a shout went up. Elizabeth shut her eyes and held her hands tightly over them. Scared as she had been, she was sorry for the creature.

"You got him at the first shot," cried Jim. "My, ain't he a whopping big fellow! As I said, sissy, he is as big as a calf. You wasn't so far out."

"It is a lynx, true enough," declared Mr. Hollins, "although I cannot imagine how one could have wandered down this way, so near to human habitations."

"I said there'd be a mate when Neal Paine shot that there other one back there in the woods awhile ago," said Jim Powers. "I surmised there'd be a pair of them. I wouldn't wonder if they got druv out by forest fires and come ambling down this way. There's a good stretch of wild country up there in the next county. These here critturs journeyed down

from Canada, likely, though I've heard of a few around in spots this side the border. I guess he belongs to sissy, here, by right of discovery. What you going to do with him, sis? Make a set of furs out of him?"

"Oh, no!" Elizabeth could not bear the idea. Scared as she had been she was too tender-hearted to think of wearing the skin of the animal which she had just seen as a living, free, wild creature. "I would much rather not," she shook her head when her father looked at her questioningly. "Why, I was almost acquainted with him, father, and it wouldn't seem right to wear the skin of a person you have known."

The men shouted with laughter. "Well, if that don't beat all," cried Jim Powers. "Skin of a person you have known. I didn't know lynxes was people. I'll have to tell my wife that."

"I think we'd better have him stuffed and present him to the State museum," said Mr. Hollins. He is a fine specimen. See his short tail and the tufts of hair on his ears. There is no doubt of his identity."

It was quite dark by this time, and as Elizabeth insisted that she was quite able to walk uphill

again, she followed in the wake of the procession which bore the body of the lynx to the blacksmith's shop. Bill Walker, having a lantern, led the way; Jim Powers and Mr. Hollins bore the lynx on their shoulders, Bert and Elizabeth brought up the rear. In her excitement Elizabeth did not miss the effect of this picturesque sight. "It looks like a scene in a book," she whispered to Bert. "Like those hunting pictures when they bore home the trophies of the chase."

But Bert had no eye for the artistic, although he did admire the spoils of the chase. "Gee, but he's got a pretty fur," he said. "I'll bet Kath will speak for it."

"She won't get it, then," retorted Elizabeth, "for father is going to have it stuffed; he said so."

"I wouldn't mind having it to hang up in my den," returned Bert. "My, wouldn't the fellows envy me."

"You won't get it any more than Kathie. If anyone has it Dick will."

"Who says so?"

"I do. Jim said it belonged to me by right of discovery."

Bert had nothing to say to this, and they continued their way to the blacksmith's shop where the body of the lynx was laid in state for the observation and comment of the entire community.

Elizabeth's first remark when, with her father and Bert, she reached home, was in the nature of an argument that was not to be gainsaid. "I told you so, miss," she exclaimed to her sister. "You made fun of me for wanting to carry a scarifying umbrella; I only wish I had had one this evening."

"Why, did a cow run you?" inquired Kathie flippantly.

"Nothing of the kind," returned Elizabeth, on her dignity, and feeling very sure of her position. "I was attacked by a wild beast, a really, truly one. You may believe it or not. Ask father if you think I am making it up." Elizabeth held her head very high and felt that she had a perfect right to assume an important air.

"What is she talking about, Herbert?" inquired Mrs. Hollins. "And where have you all been? Supper is ready and waiting."

"She is pretty near the truth," returned Mr. Hollins. "I don't know that she was exactly attacked,

but she might have been; at any rate she was chased by a lynx down there in the hollow by the bridge."

"Why, father, is that really so?" cried Kathie, looking at Elizabeth with new interest. "You poor, little child, I expect you were nearly scared to death."

"How did you know it was a lynx?" asked Mrs. Hollins, putting an arm around Elizabeth.

"Because I shot it," he made answer.

"Yes, he did," Bert chimed in, feeling that he was not getting his share of the glory. "I ran and told him and he came with his rifle and we all hunted it up and there it was in a tree and father shot it. Gee! but it was big. It's down at the blacksmith's shop this very minute; you can see it there if you want to."

Then the whole story was gone over and Elizabeth felt herself a great heroine, for she spared none of the details of her horror and fright when she was telling her part of the tale. In fact, she made it so graphic that Babs was afraid to go to bed lest a lynx or some other terrible beast should be in the closet or should creep in by the window. Seeing the effect of her story, Elizabeth tried to soothe

her by telling her that angels with flaming swords would be near by to destroy any evil things.

"But," whimpered Babs, "I is afraid of ze angels, too. I wiss zey wouldn't have swords."

So, as it fell to Elizabeth's lot to put her little sister to bed that night, she had to promise to stay with her and see that there was nothing in or out of the room to frighten her. "I will sing 'Glory to Thee, my God this night,'" she promised Babs. "I always sing it to myself when I am afraid, especially that verse that says 'Let no ill dreams disturb my rest nor powers of darkness me molest.'"

"Does that mean Jim Powers?" inquired Babs, lifting her head.

"No, of course it doesn't," Elizabeth told her. "It means things like mosquitoes and bats."

Babs put down her head again and listened while Elizabeth sang in her small childish voice. But the hymn did not prove as convincing as Elizabeth hoped, for when she had finished Babs lifted her head again. "Is it all dead?" she asked. "Can't it walk?"

"Of course it is dead," Elizabeth told her; "it is as dead as a door-nail, although I don't know

why they say that. It can't walk nor fly nor do anything, and it is locked up in Jim Powers's blacksmith shop so it couldn't get out if it wanted to."

This assured Babs somewhat, but she could not go to sleep till Elizabeth lay down by her and told her a funny story about a wee, wee little fairy that lived in a chestnut burr. She finally grew so sleepy in the telling that she dropped off into slumber herself and was not roused until her mother came up to bed, when she was helped in undressing and cuddled down at last, hearing drowsily her mother say: "Good-night, dear little girl. Your mother is very thankful she has you safe."

Elizabeth half lifted her arm to give her mother a hug, but it fell back again before she could raise it to her mother's neck, and the next thing she knew it was broad daylight, the sun shining in her window and Babs was tickling her to waken her up.

CHAPTER VII

WINTER DOINGS

AS the heroine of such an adventure, Elizabeth was the admiration and envy of the whole school while Bert was a close second. Being at the boastful age, Bert was not slow in discoursing upon how "we" did thus and so; "We" chased the lynx—"We" shot him—"We" carried him to Jim Powers's shop. "Yes, sir, I tell you he came mighty near to springing on me," was his greatest boast.

As for Elizabeth, she bore herself more modestly, but nevertheless was willing to tell of her experience with all the thrilling details she could think of while the boys and girls gathered around in breathless attention.

Big Phil Selden, who had never taken the least notice of Elizabeth, secretly placed a huge red apple on her desk. Leonora Stayman offered her a ring set with a blue stone. Maria Black asked if she couldn't walk home with her. As these were all two

or three years older than Elizabeth and counted her among the little girls, she considered herself much complimented.

The mild weather suddenly gave place to a sharp frost, which was followed by the first snow, and Elizabeth became much in demand for coasting. Not a boy that was not willing to drag her uphill for the sake of coasting down again in her company; not a girl who would not have done the same if Elizabeth had allowed it. This did all very well for awhile, but finally she grew tired of having honor thrust upon her and, moreover, found that however popular she might be with the boys she was losing favor with the girls; even her own Betsy and Bess once or twice walked home without her. Elizabeth was quick-tempered upon sudden provocation, but was long-suffering where her friends were concerned, so she did not resent these slights until she overheard Bess say: "Humph! I suppose we're not old enough for her to care for. Well, let her go with the big girls if she wants to!"

"You'd better say boys," replied Betsy. "She went down on Phil Selden's sled three times yesterday afternoon."

"Some people are too lazy to pull their own sleds uphill," returned Bess.

Elizabeth, in the cloakroom, heard it all. She flounced out, her cheeks blazing and her eyes snapping. "You mean, deceitful, jealous things!" she cried. "I heard every word you said, and I don't want to speak to you. I am going to ask Miss Jewett to let me change my seat, Betsy Tyson, and as for you, Bess Ferguson—no wonder the boys don't want to drag a great fat thing like you uphill. I'll never, never be friends with you again, so there!" She flounced out the door and down the path before the schoolhouse, pounding her feet down very hard and trying to keep back the smarting tears.

Betsy and Bess looked at one another dismayed. "Now we've done it," said Betsy. "You needn't have called her lazy, Bess. You know she isn't."

"That wasn't half as bad as what you said," returned Bess, aggrieved.

"Well, I didn't really mean it," returned Betsy. "I didn't know she was in there, did you?"

"Indeed I didn't. I wouldn't have had her hear for the world."

"I don't suppose she will ever forgive us."

"I am not at all sure that I want to forgive her. I think what she said was a great deal worse than what we did."

"You *are* fat, you know," replied Betsy, ready to be a little spiteful.

"I'd rather be nice and plump than be a little skinny thing like you," returned Bess.

Betsy curled her lip scornfully. "Oh yes, we're very well pleased with ourselves, aren't we? Wait till you have to do your arithmetic alone and you won't be so pleased at having quarrelled with Elizabeth."

"I don't care," replied Bess with an air of supreme indifference. "I'm not the only one who did the quarrelling; you were as bad as I."

"You began it."

"But I only said things about girls and you said about boys; that was a great deal worse."

"I didn't mean it; I was mad," Betsy repeated.

Bess was not ready to acknowledge that much. Elizabeth's remarks still rankled and as anything relating to her personal appearance was a tender subject with Bess she could not forget very soon. "I'm not going to apologize, are you?" she said.

"She ought to apologize first. If she doesn't, I'll take you for my first best friend, Betsy."

"Indeed you won't, then," returned Betsy. "If I can't have Elizabeth I don't want anybody."

"Oh, very well," responded Bess with a haughty air. "Nobody wants you, I'm sure." And she walked off, leaving Betsy torn by varied emotions.

For two whole days the three girls did not speak to one another. Each went her own way. Betsy moped by herself. Bess selected Flo Harris as a companion. Elizabeth sought out the older girls, and it must be said that, in defiance, she was more friendly than usual with the boys.

Then appeared upon the scene Corinne Barker, a city girl, who dressed stylishly and accepted attentions with the air of one conferring a great favor. Her parents had gone abroad and she was to spend the months of their absence with her aunt and uncle. She was a little older than Bess though somewhat younger than Leonora Stayman and Maria Black. Bess was ready to make overtures at once. Corinne's real coral necklace, her flashing ring which far outshone Elizabeth's modest little turquoise, her gold bangle, all these won Bess's admiration, and it must

be said that there were others who looked with envious eyes at these possessions. In imitation of Corinne, Bess changed the style of wearing her hair and presented herself with her usually smooth locks pulled down in scraggy loops over her forehead and bound down with a fillet. It was not becoming, but Bess prided herself upon its being in the latest style. Within the next twenty-four hours nearly every girl had followed the new fashion. Betsy arose early, had breakfast before her aunt and uncle and so escaped detection. Miss Emily would never have approved, Betsy well knew. When she took her place by Elizabeth's side, her desk mate gave her an amused, supercilious glance which did not escape Corinne's eye. Elizabeth, be it said, had made up her mind not to ape the new pupil, for she had taken a dislike to her from the first. Corinne, recognizing in Elizabeth a leader, was ready to make war against her, and so matters stood after the second day of Corinne's coming.

Betsy had begun to make overtures to her first best. She well knew her aunt would not permit her to adopt the new fashion of arranging her hair and she also knew it was far from becoming. Betsy's

little dark face, overshadowed by her dusky locks, looked like some small animal's; still she wanted to prove that she could follow the style if she wanted to. Not only little girls, but the world in general, will take pattern after a flock of sheep; let one jump over a fence, the rest will jump after it. Betsy had made the jump to show that she could, but she was ready to return to her familiar field, the more especially as she missed the companionship of Elizabeth.

At recess a flock of girls gathered around Corinne to examine her corals, to borrow her ring for a moment, to see how it would look on another hand, to hear her recount the number of parties and teas which she had attended. The schoolhouse porch was by no means deserted that day, for Corinne preferred it to any outside spot. Elizabeth with her older friends sat on a bench by the gate, a row of boys perched like crows on the fence above them. Betsy uncertainly hovered between the two places.

"Come here, Betsy," called Corinne. "See if my ring will fit your third finger; it is too small for Bess. Flo says it will be too big for you, but I don't believe it. I know my hand is smaller than yours."

Betsy paused in taking a second bite of her big

red apple, and looked uncertainly toward the group by the fence.

"Your hair looks real nice," continued Corinne. "Bess says she didn't believe you would dare to change it."

"I don't think it looks very nice," replied Betsy doubtfully; "I just tried it for to-day to see how it would look. I am going back to the old way to-morrow."

"I wouldn't," Corinne went on. "It mightn't look nice if you had red hair like some people we know. Nobody can be good-looking with red hair, and they must always expect to be made fun of." This was spoken quite nonchalantly and with a little laugh.

Then all Betsy's loyalty arose. She knew how sensitive Elizabeth was about her auburn locks, and that she had heard every word Corinne said, as it was intended she should. "Real red hair, of course," responded Betsy. "But there is nothing in the world so beautiful as auburn hair. True auburn hair is very rare, my uncle says. All the artists rave over it, and anyone who has it doesn't have to wear it like common folks." Then, having flung forth her

defiance, Betsy turned and ran to where Elizabeth sat on the end of the bench, snuggling up close to her, putting her hand in hers, and whispering, "I just hate that Corinne Barker. I wish she had stayed at home."

Elizabeth gave the little hand a squeeze and Maria Black remarked, "I think Elizabeth Hollins has the prettiest hair I ever saw. I am glad she has sense enough to wear it as she does. I wish you could have heard my brother make fun of me this morning. I almost was ashamed to be seen after what he said about my hair. I'll not dare to wear it so another day, I can tell you." As Maria was the oldest girl in school her words carried weight and Elizabeth looked at her with grateful eyes.

So peace was once more restored between Elizabeth and Betsy. But Bess still hung off; she could not forget that Elizabeth had called her fat, but she was soon almost the only one who sought out Corinne. The older girls avoided her, the boys would have nothing to do with her. Boys despise a girl who makes mean little pin-pricking remarks about other girls. When they have a grievance they fight it out with their fists and have done with it.

Miss Jewett had noticed the coolness between Betsy and Elizabeth and was sorry. These two were her favorite pupils although she tried not to show partiality. As she was some day to marry Betsy's uncle, Mr. Robert Tyson, she often discussed her scholars with him. "I wonder what is wrong between Elizabeth and Betsy," she said to him one evening. "Has Betsy confided in you?"

"Haven't had any report," returned Mr. Tyson. "They sometimes have these little flare-ups, but they don't last."

"I believe all girls do have them," said Miss Jewett reflectively. "It seems to go with youthful friendships. Perhaps the charm of making up makes them more ready to quarrel. This time it seems rather serious. I notice the two have scarcely spoken to one another for two whole days, though they sit side by side."

"That does look serious. What about Bess Ferguson? Which side does she take?"

"Oh, she has gone over entirely to the new element. I have Mrs. Wilmer's niece, Corinne Barker, you know, and she has made quite a sensation."

"In what way?"

"Rather a silly way. I don't like her influence with my sweet, simple girls. She is putting wrong notions in their heads and is stirring up discord, I am afraid. Of course, one must expect girls to admire trinkets, but I don't think it is good taste for them to put them on when they come to school. This Corinne Barker enjoys nothing so much as making a display and is the envy of the whole school. She wears her hair in an abominable fashion which I was amused today to see imitated by nearly every girl in school. Even Betsy came with frowsy locks pulled down over her pretty low forehead. It gave her an uncanny look for she has such a mite of a face that it seemed to leave her with only half enough."

"I'll venture to say aunt Em didn't observe it," returned Mr. Tyson with a little laugh. "I must look tomorrow morning and see for myself."

But there was nothing wrong with Betsy when her uncle next saw her, for her hair was arranged in its usual neat fashion and she appeared in good spirits. "Isn't aunt Emily down yet?" she inquired as she came into the breakfast-room where her uncle was looking over the morning paper.

"Not yet, but we needn't wait. You can begin on your orange if you like."

Betsy seated herself and her uncle put down his paper. "What is the matter with you and Elizabeth?" he asked. "I hear you are at odds again."

"Who told you? We are not, whoever it was," Betsy replied.

"But weren't you?"

"Well, yes," Betsy answered hesitatingly; "we were for a little while."

"How did it happen?"

"Well, she overheard something Bess and I were saying and she pounced out at us and got awfully mad and called us mean, jealous, horrid things. Then she said Bess was fat and that we were both deceitful, so —" Betsy paused.

"So," — repeated her uncle, — "there was a big row. What made her say you were all those things? Were you?"

Betsy looked down at her plate. "I believe we were a little."

"What were you saying about her?"

Betsy was honest and did not hesitate to tell.

"Bess said she was lazy and I said she liked to play with the boys better than with us girls."

"Was it true?"

"Why, you see everybody made a lot of her after her adventure with the lynx and of course she liked it. Phil Selden has the very nicest sled in school and he took her on it ever and ever so many times, then Maria Black made a fuss over her and Leonora Stayman gave her a ring that was too small for herself and — and — "

"You and Bess were jealous, I see. So that much was true, and you said things to one another behind her back that you wouldn't have said to her face. I suppose we might call that deceitful."

Betsy nodded in token that she thought this true. "And Bess is fat," she declared.

Mr. Tyson repressed a smile. "While no one can say truthfully that Elizabeth is lazy. It looks to me as if you had the worst of it, Betsy. The court convicts you on your own evidence and condemns you to pay Miss Elizabeth Hollins ten kisses in return for her injured feelings."

"I've already paid them," returned Betsy gravely. "We made up today after Corinne Barker called

her a red-head. I wouldn't stand that, you know; so I said what I thought and I am never going to have anything to do with her, with Corinne, I mean."

"Not even to the extent of adopting her manner of wearing her hair," said Mr. Tyson slyly.

"Oh, uncle Rob, did Miss Jewett tell you? Of course she must have. It was silly, of course, but I just wanted to see how it looked."

"Did you find out?"

"It didn't look nice a bit. Elizabeth told me on her sacred honor that I was a sight, though that isn't the reason I gave it up, at least it isn't the only reason. We have formed ourselves into two parties, Styles and Non-styles. Elizabeth and I belong to the Non-styles, so do Maria and Leonora. Bess belongs to the Styles, but we don't care."

"I must say that I approve more heartily of the Non-styles myself," Mr. Tyson told her. "But here comes your aunt Em. I'll not tell, Betsy" — a promise which Betsy was glad to hear.

CHAPTER VIII

BESS GIVES A PARTY

CHRISTMAS came. Betsy and Elizabeth presented their gifts to Miss Jewett upon the last day of school before the holidays began. Miss Jewett's desk showed a great stack of gifts, the most showy being a sofa pillow from Corinne Barker and the most appreciated being those which Elizabeth and Betsy had made themselves. Elizabeth spent much thought upon the composition of a proper set of verses to go with the scent bag, and finally produced the following:

I gathered from our garden beds
These simple herbs for you,
For they are sweet and you are sweet,
I'm telling what is true.

I fain would be dried as they
If I might dwell within
Your handkerchiefs and laces gay
You fasten with a pin.

Whene'er you ope your bureau drawer
And smell this bag I send,
I pray you think of one who signs
Herself, your loving friend.
Herbs are not pollens.
Elizabeth Hollins.

There were tears in Miss Jewett's eyes as well as laughter on her lips when she read this effusion. "The dear, ridiculous child," she murmured, "she is so preciously funny."

It had taken Elizabeth a long time to find anything to rhyme with Hollins and she felt very triumphant when she discovered the word pollen, though plural it has none. Elizabeth, however, never let a little thing of that kind appall her and often took such poetic license as would have amazed a greater poet. She did not show her rhymes to anyone, not even to Betsy, for she had a romantic feeling that the more secret the more tender. She wrote the verses, in her best manner, on the back of a Christmas card showing an angel with a violin. She had commissioned her brother Dick to get this for her. To his credit be it told, that he took much trouble and only after searching long and faithfully did he find what she wanted and sent it to her. To say that Elizabeth was pleased only half expresses it.

Her letter of thanks to Dick was characteristic. She said:

DEAR DICK,—I am abnormally obliged to you for taking the trouble to send me the enchanting card. It is exactly what I wanted and is memorably lovely. What it is to have a brother!

I remain, my dear sir,

Yours gratefully,

ELIZABETH.

Dick had a good laugh over the letter and put it away among those he treasured. "It will amuse her some day when she has grown up," he told himself.

Miss Jewett was trying to help Elizabeth in her use of words but there had not been time as yet to show much result from her teaching. On the day that school closed for the holidays Bess announced importantly that she was going to give a party on New Year's night. She had not returned to her allegiance but showed both Betsy and Elizabeth that she vastly preferred Corinne to either of them. They, therefore, wondered if an invitation to this festivity would be given them.

"It would be dreadful to be left out," declared Elizabeth as she and Betsy were talking it over.

"It would be almost a disgrace, for she will invite nearly everybody in the school, except the very little children, of course."

"She won't have a very big party if she is going to invite only those who are friends with Corinne," returned Betsy caustically. "We've known her all our lives and our families are friends and all that."

"I suppose it will be as her mother and grandmother say, anyhow," — Elizabeth took some comfort in this.

"And I'd like to see Mrs. Lynde offend my aunt Emily; she wouldn't do it, for they are very intimate friends. I shall tell her about the party right away and of course she will expect that I am to go."

So much for Betsy's prospects. Elizabeth was not so sure of her own. Bess had painted her plans in vivid colors, her ambition being to give such an affair as should be equal to those described by Corinne. Musicians discoursing sweet strains of music behind a screen of palms, a supper ordered from a caterer in the city, party dresses made to order for the occasion, sounded very grand to little girls used only to very simple affairs. "I suppose If I do go," said Elizabeth, "I couldn't have a real

party dress; I would just have to wear my best white."

"I suppose I should, too. Aunt Emily doesn't approve of little girls like us having real dressy clothes."

"I heard Bess say that her dress was to be blue chiffon over blue silk with tiny pink rosebuds on it. Won't it be beautiful?"

"Oh, I suppose so," returned Betsy carelessly. "I reckon she will enjoy it more than anyone else. If you wear white, Elizabeth, I will wear it, too, so we can keep each other company. We will not be the only ones, either, for I don't suppose half the girls will have really truly party dresses."

"Have you heard what Corinne is going to wear?" asked Elizabeth.

"White lace over pink, I believe; at least that is what Flo Harris told me."

This promised to be very fine attire, thought Elizabeth, yet she was comforted by what Betsy had said — that not half the girls would have real party dresses and would go in whatever might be the most appropriate thing they had.

The next day saw Corinne and Bess driving

around town in a pony cart delivering the invitations. Corinne had spoken her mind when they first started forth. "If you are going to invite that red-headed Elizabeth Hollins you can count me out," she said.

"Oh, but Corinne, I have to," replied Bess. "Grandmother and mamma made out the list and her name was one of the first. I really have nothing to do with it, you see."

"We'll manage some way," declared Corinne. "Just you leave it to me. She lives so far out that we will have to leave it till the last, anyway, and I doubt if we get through in time to go there, so we can take it to the post-office."

"Oh, but,—" began Bess, slightly disturbed, yet not exactly seeing how mailing an invitation would prevent its reaching its destination.

"Now see here," continued Corinne, "which would you rather would come to the party, Elizabeth or I?"

Bess remembered the lace-over-pink frock which would add glory to her entertainment and promptly replied: "You, of course."

"Then if you want me you can't have her. I'm not going to see her sailing around and being

made so much of. What do you suppose she will wear, Bess?"

"Oh, I suppose she wouldn't get a new dress for the occasion. She will wear her best white, I suppose."

"Humph!" Corinne gave a scornful exclamation. "Now listen. We will go to the post-office with her invitation; when we get inside you hand her invitation to me and I'll do the rest. You can say you took it yourself to the post-office, can't you? That will be the strict truth; you don't have to know what happens after that."

Bess had an idea of what would happen and felt very reluctant to hand over the invitation to Corinne, so she was silent.

"Aren't you going to do it?" asked Corinne. "I suppose you will like her going around telling everybody that you are too fat to look well in your lovely new frock."

This was rather a back-handed way of putting it, but Bess did not perceive that; she only saw that the glory of her attire might be undervalued; and so she gave in, at the same time feeling conscience-stricken and more unhappy as time went on.

At the post-office she gave the envelope into Corinne's hands, turned her back and asked no questions. "Now then," said Corinne as they came out, "if anyone asks you all you have to say is that you took the invitation to the post-office yourself, and it will be perfectly true."

Betsy promptly reported to her first best that she had received her invitation, that her aunt Emily said she was to go and could wear her white mull. "Which of your white frocks are you going to wear, Elizabeth?" she asked.

"I don't suppose I shall wear any of them," returned Elizabeth, in a subdued voice. "I haven't been invited."

"Oh, Elizabeth, I don't believe it. I saw Corinne and Bess driving old Fan around in the pony-cart yesterday. Perhaps they didn't have time to come out here and you will get yours today."

This was an encouraging possibility; but as day after day went by and no invitation came Elizabeth was fain to believe that she had been left out.

"I'm just going to ask," said Betsy indignantly. "I don't see how they dared not ask you. I am

going to ask Mrs. Lynde myself why you weren't invited."

"Oh, no, please don't, Betsy. I wouldn't for the world have them think I cared." Elizabeth had pride in the matter.

"Well, I shall find out some way." Betsy was determined. "If you don't go I shall stay away, and if aunt Emily asks me why, I am going to up and tell her."

This was loyalty beyond expectation. To deliberately absent one's self from a party such as this promised to be showed great strength of mind, thought Elizabeth. "I don't want you to do that," she said. "I want you to go and then tell me all about it. I didn't really think that Bess was keeping on being so very very mad with me," she added.

"I don't believe it is Bess at all; I believe it is all that horrid Corinne Barker."

"But she didn't make out the list. I heard Bess say, myself, that her grandmother and mother were doing it."

"You never know," returned Betsy.

But as the days passed by there was no solution of the mystery. Christmas came and went and

the fact of having no party in anticipation did not in the least interfere with Elizabeth's enjoyment of the day. Darling Miss Jewett had given her a beautiful copy of "Little Women" and had added a photograph of herself in a pretty frame. As Elizabeth had heretofore depended upon borrowing from Betsy when she wanted to read anything of Miss Alcott's, this first contribution towards a set of the much-prized books gave intense delight. As for the photograph, it was kissed rapturously and at the first opportunity Elizabeth hastened off to the giver to express her thanks.

After greetings and thanks were over Miss Jewett said: "And now I suppose the next excitement is the party Bess is going to give."

Elizabeth's face fell. "I suppose it will be very exciting to those who are going," she answered sadly.

"Why, but surely you are going. Is there any reason why you should not?" asked Miss Jewett. She did not know what cause might keep Elizabeth at home, although she knew Mrs. Hollins was not liable to deprive her little daughter of this pleasure without good reason.

"There is a very good reason," Elizabeth told her: "I am not invited."

"Oh, but Elizabeth, there must be some mistake. I saw the list myself, and I can vouch for your name being on it. I am sure I saw it. Neither Mrs. Lynde nor Mrs. Ferguson would be so unkind as to leave you out. There must be some mistake."

"I don't believe there is," said Elizabeth, "for Bess and Corinne took around the invitations themselves, and Bess would know. She couldn't forget me even if she isn't friends any more."

"Aren't you friends? I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"I'm friends, but Bess isn't," said Elizabeth. "She hasn't been since she became such chums with Corinne."

Miss Jewett was thoughtful for a moment, then she repeated: "There must be some mistake. I still think so. I wouldn't feel badly, Elizabeth, until we really discover what is the matter."

It was not till two days before the date of the party that Miss Jewett had an opportunity of asking any questions. She spent part of her holidays with her own family and did not return until the morning

of the thirtieth. On the train she met Mrs. Ferguson who had been to the city to make some necessary purchases for the entertainment, and the two chatted together until they reached Brookdale.

In discussing the different girls Mrs. Ferguson spoke of Elizabeth in such a manner as to lead Miss Jewett to believe that she was expected to be one of the guests.

“Bess is very particular that we should consider this a most formal affair,” said Mrs. Ferguson, “and is quite put out when any of those invited fail to write a note of acceptance; but I tell her it is too much to expect all that from the little girls who do not know grown-up ways, and she must take it for granted that all will come whether they say so or not.”

“Who are those who have failed to be so formal as Bess requires?” asked Miss Jewett.

“Elizabeth Hollins, for one, but she and Bess have always been so intimate that there is no need for her to write. Bess has not mentioned her case, but did become quite miffed because Flo Harris only called across the street: ‘I’m coming, Bess.’ ‘That isn’t the way young ladies in the city would do,’ Bess said to me.”

"I think I can tell you why Elizabeth has not answered," returned Miss Jewett; "she never received her invitation. I know her well enough to be sure that nothing would please her so much as to write a most formal and highly-flown note, and besides she told me herself on Christmas Day that she was not going to the party because she had not been invited."

"Dear me," returned Mrs. Ferguson; "that is most unfortunate. I would not hurt the dear child's feelings for the world. I must see to the matter as soon as I get home."

She lost no time in doing this but put the question to Bess almost as soon as she reached home. "Bess," she said, "I have just heard that Elizabeth Hollins failed to get her invitation to your party. You must go out there this very afternoon and tell her, or, better still, I will write an invitation in proper form so she will not feel slighted. I don't see how it happened that she did not get one. I am sure that she was not overlooked, for I looked over the envelopes myself before I put them in the basket."

"Did you give it to Elizabeth herself?" asked Mrs. Lynde.

"No, grandmamma," Bess replied. "I took it to the post-office. It was so late when we got through that Corinne said we'd better take it to the post-office."

"As long as that was the furthest point you had to go you should have gone there first," said Mrs. Lynde, "and have left the places nearer home till the last. It is too bad, but evidently it has gone astray."

Bess said never a word though she was really relieved that Elizabeth would have her invitation after all. She would not say a word to Corinne about it, and when she came to the party and found Elizabeth there she would surely not go away.

But it happened that it was not Bess who took the invitation for she was in demand by the dressmaker that afternoon and could not be spared, so Mrs. Ferguson hastily wrote a note and ran in to see if Betsy would be so good as to take it with the invitation to Elizabeth. Would Betsy refuse? Of course not. She went on wings of joy and burst in upon Elizabeth in great excitement. "It's here, it's here," she cried. "It was a mistake, after all. They did send it and you didn't get it. Read the

note." She thrust the envelopes into Elizabeth's hand and stood by panting from the haste with which she had come.

Elizabeth was not long in understanding the contents of the note. "Joy! Joy!" she cried. "Mother, Kath, it's come! It was a mistake after all. I can go! I can go!"

"What in the world is this all about?" asked Kathie, coming in from the next room, followed by her mother.

"The party," answered Elizabeth. "I can go, for they did send me an invitation and I never got it at all. Oh, I am so glad. Shall I wear my white dress or my organdy?"

"We will look them over and see," promised her mother.

"We'd better be quick about it then; there is only one more day in case there is anything to be done to make a dress ready," said Kathie. And Elizabeth flew to the attic to bring down her summer store of frocks.

CHAPTER IX

IN DESPAIR

AS Elizabeth tossed the pile of summer frocks on the lounge her mother took them up one by one and examined them. Finally she selected two and said: "These seem to be in the best condition, but it has been several months since you wore them and you have grown, Elizabeth. You'd better try them on and if they are all right I will get Electra to press out one of them."

Off went Elizabeth's frock, Betsy's nimble fingers helping her to unfasten it. "Try the white one first," suggested Betsy.

Elizabeth slipped it on, then looked down at her arms and legs which seemed to have shot out suddenly like a telescope. "Oh dear, it is much too short in the sleeves and skirt," she exclaimed. "I didn't know I had grown so much."

"You remember that you did not wear this many times last summer, for you were laid up with

those eyes of yours," said her mother. "One can grow a good deal in six months. Try the other one, daughter. Perhaps it will be better."

Elizabeth tried on the next selection, a pretty little organdy with tiny bunches of flowers over it. She liked this frock very much and hoped it would do. But, alas, it was as bad as the other, and Elizabeth's face fell. "I can never wear them, can I, mother? What shall I do? I have nothing but winter frocks and they will look so funny. I'd almost rather not go than wear a woollen frock when all the other girls will have on light ones."

Kathie had taken up the white frock and was examining it. "It would be very little trouble to change these into elbow sleeves if there were any way of lengthening the skirt. It has already been faced, I see. I suppose you haven't a piece of embroidery or insertion that could be put on."

Elizabeth's face brightened as she listened to the suggestions. It seemed a very easy matter to make the alterations, she thought.

But Mrs. Hollins shook her head. "I am afraid I have not a scrap of anything that would do and it is too late to send to town for anything. I use

up materials very closely, and what Elizabeth outgrows we make over for Babs, you know. Let us see what can be done with the organdy."

Kathie began overlooking the frock. "It hasn't been faced," she said, "but I am afraid it has faded and would show where it was let down. I will measure the other skirts and see if there are any longer than these or that have not been faced."

However, it appeared that there was nothing any more promising. Elizabeth's wardrobe had not been added to very liberally the summer past as she was housed the greater part of it. Seeing the state of things, the tears gathered in the child's eyes. "I can't go, I can't go," she wailed. "Oh, fate is cruel, cruel! To hold this beautiful prospect before me and then to snatch it away. I was resigned to staying at home till I got the invitation, but now it is much more bitter."

"My dear child," begged her mother, "don't take it so tragically. We will try to contrive something. If we only had a little more time we could make over something, I am sure, but with only one day, I am afraid we couldn't. I wish I had more of that white material, Kathie; it might do to piece

on a hem; it could be done neatly, or could be joined with lace or something of that kind. I am sure I have no more of the stuff, for I remember I used the last scrap for the sleeves. Suppose you look through your things and see what there is; you might find something that could be ripped from one of your frocks and could be used."

Elizabeth lifted her head from the pillow where she had buried it, and felt somewhat heartened. "Would you have time to alter it, mother, if Kathie does find anything?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I think so," said her mother cheerfully. "We will make time. There is the rest of this afternoon and evening, and all day tomorrow."

"But tomorrow is New Year's; I'd hate to have you sew all day on New Year's Day," said Elizabeth.

"I might be doing something worse," replied her mother with a smile. "Don't worry over that, my dear. If we can find anything to eke out I shall be only too glad to do the sewing and Kathie can help."

Presently Kathie returned with some things hanging over her arm. "I am afraid there is nothing

among my things that will match the lace on the waist," she said, "but we can see." Then followed an attempt at matching, much discussion and suggestion, but finally one after another garment was discarded. Kathie sat with knitted brows, pinching her lips and turning over the remainder of Elizabeth's frocks. The least attractive frock seemed the only possible one; it was a plain little dimity which nobody regarded with much favor.

"I'm in despair," said Elizabeth plaintively. "I hate not to look as nice as the others."

"I hate it, too," said her mother, "but I do not see anything else to do."

"I will lend you my gold beads," said Kathie comfortingly, "and I will look among my ribbons to see if I can find anything that will do for your hair. I wish you had some pretty slippers and stockings; they would add a great deal."

"I have white stockings, and those white canvas slippers. I suppose they will have to do."

"I will clean the shoes," Kathie offered, "and they will not look badly."

She picked up the dimity frock and began to rip out the hem.

Elizabeth watched her with anything but enthusiasm. It did seem hard luck that the very prettiest of her frocks must be the one that she could not wear. Presently Kathie threw down her work and went out of the room. Just then Miss Jewett was announced. "I could not rest till I learned whether you had your invitation to the party, Elizabeth," she said, "I found out this morning from Mrs. Ferguson that by all rights you should have had it and I hoped she had sent it."

"She did send it right away, by Betsy," Elizabeth told her. "Did you have a good time, Miss Jewett? I am so glad you have come back."

"I believe I am glad to get back," replied Miss Jewett with a smile. "Of course I was glad to be with my people and to see my friends, but I never did care for a big city and after being here all this time it seemed more unattractive than ever. But, Elizabeth, you don't seem to be very enthusiastic about the party."

"I am enthusiastic about the party," answered she, "but I am far, far from enthusiastic about my frock. Isn't it a cruel misfortune, Miss Jewett, that I have grown so that all my summer clothes

are too small for me. Only one, poor, mean little dimity can be made to do. I wouldn't care so much if this were not so very, very grand a party and all the fine dressing there will make me appear a poor Cinderella indeed."

Miss Jewett laughed. "But you must remember that Cinderella had perfectly gorgeous clothes for the party; her fairy godmother saw to that, you know."

"But, alas, I have no fairy godmother," returned Elizabeth. "I must confess, Miss Jewett," she whispered, "that I shouldn't care so much if it were not for Corinne. I know she will nudge the others and look me up and down in that supersillyous way she has."

There was mirth in Miss Jewett's eyes as she asked: "How do you spell supercilious, Elizabeth?"

"S-u, su, p-e-r, per, s-i-l-l-y, silly, o-u-s, ous," replied Elizabeth promptly.

"Before I tell you whether that is right or wrong I would like to know what is your idea of the meaning of the word," said Miss Jewett.

"Super means above, or more than," Elizabeth answered, "so I should think it meant more than silly."

Miss Jewett threw back her head and laughed heartily. "Oh, Elizabeth, I might know you would have some original way of getting at it. Your dictionary will tell you that it is derived from a Latin word which means lifting an eyebrow."

"Oh, yes, that is just the way Corinne does," returned Elizabeth with satisfaction. "She lifts her eyebrows in that haughty way and makes you feel so — so, — —"

"Like slapping her," put in Betsy.

"That is just what you do feel like," agreed Elizabeth. "I should enjoy the party much more if she were not going to be there."

"Well, there is one thing you may be sure of," said Miss Jewett confidently; "you will enjoy it much more than she will, for all her fine clothes."

"How can you tell that, Miss Jewett?" asked Elizabeth.

"The kingdom of heaven is within you," quoted Miss Jewett with a smile. "I don't believe you will mind, once you get into the good time, whether you have on a plain frock or not. Why, the best time I ever had at a party was when I wore my street dress. It was in the country and my trunk somehow

went astray, so I had to make the best of it, though everyone else had on something appropriate."

This was consoling information to Elizabeth, yet the thought of the blue chiffon and the lace-over-pink costumes still troubled her. "Betsy has a lovely white mull," she told Miss Jewett.

But just as she spoke Kathie entered. She greeted Miss Jewett cordially and in a few minutes bore her off to her room, from which Elizabeth and Betsy were excluded. Miss Jewett was very fond of Kathie and though she was several years older she enjoyed Kathie's society more than that of any other girl in the village. Kathie admired and liked Miss Jewett immensely and the two had many good times together. Probably one reason for their intimacy lay in the fact that Miss Jewett was engaged to Betsy's uncle, while Kathie and Betsy's brother, Hal, hoped some day to marry.

"I do wish Elizabeth did have something more suitable," declared Kathie, as she set to work upon the dimity skirt. "She usually doesn't care much about having a special dress, but this is supposed to be such a very grand affair and she has heard the other girls talk so much about it that somehow she

feels a little sensitive, and no wonder. If the invitation had only come in time we could have sent to the city for material to make a new frock."

"It is too bad," returned Miss Jewett. "I don't blame the child in the least for feeling a little dissatisfied; even an older person would be justified in doing so. I suppose you have nothing you could make over for her, Kathie?"

"Why, yes, I have, but there is not time enough. The party comes off tomorrow night, you know. I am perfectly willing to sew every minute, but I am afraid to promise, for it would be worse to disappoint her than to have her wear the dimity."

"What did you think of making over for her? I wish you would let me see," said Miss Jewett.

Kathie went to her clothes-press and brought out a yellow silk muslin. It had little satiny dots upon it and was very pretty. "I thought of this," she said. "It is quite impossible for me as it is. There is a big spot on the front of the skirt where one of the boys spilt ice-cream, but there is plenty in it to make an entire frock for Elizabeth."

"It would just suit her, too," Miss Jewett declared. "And I have some reddish-brown velvet

which would make lovely bows for her hair. Oh, Kathie, I wish you would let me help you make it as a surprise for her. I tell you what you do; take all the measurements and bring the stuff down to our house tomorrow morning. Auntie will be delighted to have us use her machine. We can get some of the other girls to come if your mother cannot, and we will rush it through. Now, not another word; it has got to be done. I have set my heart on it. I'll stay this evening, if you say so, and we can get it started. Oh, there will not be the slightest difficulty in finishing it, I am sure."

"You dear thing!" cried Kathie. "That would be perfectly lovely. We will not say a word to Elizabeth till it is all ready. I can see her delight."

"She will look just like a bright nasturtium," Miss Jewett went on. "I wish she had shoes and stockings the color of the velvet."

"She has only white ones that would do."

"Then I will tell you what we can do; we can dye the stockings, Auntie will attend to that; she is a great hand at dyeing, and I will paint the shoes. I have plenty of colors and I know I can do it."

"You are a positive genius," exclaimed Kathie. "I must go and tell mother; she will be so pleased."

"Shall I commence to rip up the yellow frock while you are gone?" asked Miss Jewett, determined that no time should be lost.

"It is too dark, I am afraid, but I will bring a light at once."

Mrs. Hollins was highly pleased at the secret, and the two friends began at once upon the task. Elizabeth and Betsy were denied admittance and the next morning Kathie started off early to Miss Dunbar's, carrying materials in a suit-case and providing herself with all necessary measurements as well as with one of Elizabeth's frocks for a guide. She remained away all day, calling up her mother on the telephone once in awhile to report progress, in order that Mrs. Hollins might know whether her help would be needed.

About dark Elizabeth heard her sister's and Miss Jewett's voices in the hall below. "It's all ready, Elizabeth," called Kathie cheerily. "Go into my room and we'll help you dress. Bring your things in there. We are going right up."

"I can't find my shoes and stockings," came word over the balusters presently.

"Oh, can't you?" Kathie made answer. "Never mind. I took the shoes, you know. I'll get them when I come. I do want you to see what a darling little frock we have made," she said in a subdued voice to her mother, as she hastily opened the suitcase and brought forth the yellow silk muslin. "I suppose she will have to know at once because she will have to see the shoes and stockings. Look at these dear velvet bows, mother. Won't they look fine on the child's auburn head. Mattie Paine is going to send over a yellow fan she has, and I am going to lend my beads, the gold ones. Coming, Elizabeth!"

Cutting short her mother's exclamations of admiration and pleasure, Kathie hastily put the frock back and ran upstairs, Miss Jewett and Mrs. Hollins following, all three being eager to see how Elizabeth would take her surprise.

"We shall want more light than this," decided Kathie, as she entered the room lighted by only a small lamp. "I'll go get the big lamp from mother's room, Elizabeth." She hurried out, leaving Eliza-

beth standing in the middle of the floor, dressed up to the point of petticoats but wearing her bedroom slippers. "You can take off that extra petticoat; you won't need it," remarked Kathie, setting down the lamp and lifting the suit-case to a chair.

"Why won't I need it?" inquired Elizabeth. "I always wear two with thin frocks in winter."

"Never mind, do as I tell you," commanded Kathie, fumbling at the fastening of the suit-case. "Here are your shoes and stockings," she continued with a little laugh, handing them to her sister.

"Why, why, —" began Elizabeth.

Mrs. Hollins and Miss Jewett stood by smiling at her. Kathie shook out the yellow frock. "Here is your costume, Miss Elizabeth," said Kathie. "It has changed color since last night, hasn't it?"

Elizabeth looked with astonishment growing into delight as Kathie held up the frock. Then she gave one squeal of excitement and threw herself prone on the bed, from which she immediately raised herself to say: "Oh, what a delirious dream of delight! I have a fairy godmother after all."

"You seem to have had several of them," returned her mother, "and they have been working like Tro-

jans for you all day. They gave your own mother no chance to lend a hand."

The yellow frock went on over a soft silk slip of the same color, made from Kathie's; the shoes and stockings were pronounced "Too fine for anything!" the bows were adjusted upon the curling auburn locks, the gold beads were fastened around the slim little neck and Elizabeth stood arrayed. It was a simple little costume, with elbow sleeves and round neck, very slightly cut out, but Elizabeth envied no one. Let who would wear blue chiffon and lace over pink — she did not care; and she went off with such a radiant face as repaid those who had spent New Year's Day working for her.

With her brother Dick as escort and well wrapped up for the cold walk, Elizabeth fared forth gayly. At the gate of the Lynde house they met Betsy and Hal. The house looked very festive, brightly illuminated as it was. The door was flung open with a flourish by an obsequious individual, a nephew of aunt Darkey's who had come up from the city to serve upon this occasion. "Ladies' room to de right; gemmans' to de lef," he announced, much as if he were calling off the figures in a dance; and the two little

girls excitedly went up, turning their heads to notice the decorations, the odor of flowers and the subdued strains of music. It was all their fancy painted it. "If only Corinne were different," was Elizabeth's only regret.

Betsy had been let into the secret of Elizabeth's dress, but clung to her white mull as being quite nice enough. She looked very dainty and sweet and was as appreciative as Elizabeth could wish when the wonderful frock was displayed to her. They went downstairs together and on to the drawing-room where stood Bess in all the magnificence of blue chiffon and pink rosebuds. Several guests had arrived and these stood in little groups, rather shy and awkward as yet. Elizabeth and Betsy made their greetings and then looked around the room. Corinne was not there. "Probably she preferred to be fashionably late," conjectured Elizabeth. "Corinne hasn't come yet," she ventured to Bess.

For a moment Bess was possessed by mixed feelings, part relief part shame. No one knew; no one would ever know why Elizabeth's invitation had failed to reach her at the proper time. Bess had no idea of telling. She looked at Elizabeth, really quite

pleased to see her appearing so happy and so well dressed. After all there were no friends like old friends. Elizabeth would be sure to do her share in making the party a success. She was always the life of a company. "I am awfully glad you could come, Elizabeth," she said, with her old-time cordiality. "Corinne has the mumps; she can't come."

And so the last unpleasant element passed out of Elizabeth's anticipations. It was a fine party. She enjoyed it to the extent of her ability, which was great. Betsy, too, had almost as good a time. Bess enjoyed it to the measure of her capacity, which Dick said was as a half-pint measure to a gallon, when he was comparing the fulness of his sister's joy with that of the rest.

CHAPTER X

ELIZABETH OFFENDS

THE party over and holidays past, there was nothing to look forward to but a long stretch of school-days, cold mornings and colder nights. It was generally too cold in the attic for Elizabeth to seek that retreat so she and Betsy preferred the latter's warm room where, if they played quietly, they were allowed entire freedom. Paper dolls were much in favor these times and their adventures as set afoot by Elizabeth would fill a book.

At school matters went on quietly, although there were days when Elizabeth longed for excitement. Corinne having duly recovered from her mumps, "on both sides," took her place again. She was much chagrined at having to forego the party and did not like to have Bess talk about it. As it was the favorite topic of this young person she and Corinne became less intimate. Elizabeth had given unstinted

praise to the great entertainment, had told Bess she looked perfectly lovely in her blue frock and had said many other nice things; therefore Bess was glad to be again considered second best and conveniently forgot about her share in withholding Elizabeth's invitation. The easiest way out was always the rule Bess abided by, and as long as things in the present went smoothly she did not bother about either past or future.

It was one cold day in January that Elizabeth found her excitement. If she could have foreseen the nature of it she would not have been so anxious to stir up the humdrum routine, but she did not foresee. Neither did Bert. This youngster was as full of mischief as any boy of his age is liable to be, and his chief aider and abetter was Patsy McGonigle. What one did not think of the other did. It was not that they disliked their teacher or that they wanted to annoy her, but it was so deadly dull with nothing but lessons, and sitting still was so very hard for restless creatures like themselves that if they could break the monotony by causing a little ripple of mirth they did not see why anyone should object so very much.

It was with some such thought in mind that Bert began his day. On the way to school he had captured a little field-mouse. He did not mean to hurt it, and did not know exactly what he meant to do with it, but first of all he must provide a cage for it, so he took his lunch from the tin box in which he carried it, punched a few holes through the bottom of it with a nail, popped Mr. Mouse inside, and there he was safe and secure. The luncheon was wrapped up in a piece of paper and Bert proceeded to school. Once or twice he slipped a few crumbs inside the box so that the mouse might not feel himself utterly neglected, and would realize that he had a friend at hand. The rest of the time the box rested in Bert's desk. There came a moment, however, when the spirit of mischief whispered in Bert's ear: "Why don't you have a little fun? What's the use of living if you can't have fun?" Bert listened to the voice of the charmer. Why not have some fun? If he let the mouse out, slyly, of course, no one would imagine he had anything to do with it, and it would be such sport to see the girls all jumping about and climbing up on chairs. Even Miss Jewett would be scared; it would be so funny to see her. Now was

the propitious moment, for Miss Jewett was putting some work on the board, the room was quiet, everyone was busy. Bert opened his desk a little way and put his hand in. He gently lifted the lid from the box and shut his desk quickly, then he appeared to be applying himself diligently to his books. In a few minutes he quietly opened his desk a few inches and presently the mouse peeped forth.

Just what made Elizabeth turn her head at the critical moment it would be difficult to tell, but she did so just in time to see the mouse come forth and to see Bert's eyes full of laughter. She knew Bert well enough to understand what had happened. For a second she gazed with fascinated eyes at the little creature creeping along the desk. Chilled by its stay in the tin box, it moved slowly and Elizabeth was as quick as a wink. She started up, threw her handkerchief over the mouse, grabbed it and thrust it into her desk without creating much confusion. Even Bert did not know that she had seen him open his desk to let it out. The girls and boys behind her began to giggle. Some of them saw what she did but they had not quite understood. Others thought it was a make-believe mouse which she had brought

to school to amuse herself and the rest. Some thought she had taken something of her own away from Bert, but no one knew his part in the performance, or had any idea that her whole purpose was to save Bert from discovery and the school from an uproar. It was a most exciting situation and Elizabeth rather enjoyed it. She could hear the mouse running around inside her desk and she slipped a pencil under the lid that he might have air. Betsy was all alert and looked at her inquiringly. Elizabeth suppressed a giggle. She was not in the least afraid of mice and rather admired the long ears and big eyes of the little field-mice. She would like to make a pet of this one, but it would probably be better to let it go free she decided.

Betsy continued to look from Elizabeth to her desk with an inquiring expression. Finally she could stand it no longer and wrote on her slate. "What is it?"

By the same means Elizabeth wrote her answer: "Mouse." Then both began to giggle and a titter ran around the rows of boys and girls behind them.

Miss Jewett looked around sharply. "What is the matter?" she asked.

The faces all sobered down. Lessons appeared to be the sole interest. Miss Jewett returned to her work on the board.

As soon as her back was turned all eyes were bent with interest upon Elizabeth's desk. Nothing happened and the eyes went back to the books. Presently Elizabeth discovered that she needed a book from her desk. How could she get it? What was she to do when other books were needed? She began to see difficulties before her. Why she did not have the courage to walk up to Miss Jewett and say, "Miss Jewett, there is a mouse in my desk," it is hard to say. It would have been the easiest way out of the dilemma. At all events she did not do it, but by movements and signs let Betsy understand that she wanted the loan of her dictionary.

Those in the rear began to comprehend the situation more clearly and the tittering recommenced. Just as Betsy was making the transfer Miss Jewett turned and saw who was the central figure of interest. She determined to find out what Elizabeth was doing, for she was evidently amusing the school in some way. Down the aisle walked Miss Jewett and stood at Elizabeth's desk as she received Betsy's book into

her hands. "Haven't you a dictionary of your own, Elizabeth?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Jewett," was the prompt reply.

"Why don't you use it, then? Did you leave it at home?"

"No, Miss Jewett."

"Where is it? Have you lent it?"

"No, Miss Jewett, I haven't lent it."

"Then if you have it why don't you use it? Has anything happened to it?"

"No, Miss Jewett." Elizabeth was becoming confused.

Miss Jewett glanced down at the desk and saw that it was a crack open. The mouse by this time had settled down comfortably and was making no stir; yet Miss Jewett felt that something was not exactly right. "Open your desk and get out your book, Elizabeth," said Miss Jewett in a matter-of-fact way.

"Don't let us have any more talk about it."

Elizabeth's face turned scarlet but she made no movement to obey, she only murmured, "I can't," hanging her head as she spoke. Why didn't she say more? Why didn't she say: I can't, because there is a mouse in my desk and I don't want it to scare

you and the school? Who knows why she did not? It was certainly very stupid of her not to, but then very bright girls can be very stupid sometimes.

The teacher waited for the space of a minute; then she lifted the lid of the desk and out sprang the mouse. Miss Jewett gave a small shriek and fled to the platform. The girls all gave louder shrieks and jumped up on their chairs, at least most of them did; some of the boys did too. Others began to chase the mouse who was running wildly from corner to corner.

In a moment or two Miss Jewett had regained her self-possession. "Open the door, boys, and it will find its way out," she said. "Sit down, girls. It was rather startling, I admit; but there is nothing to be afraid of."

Phil Selden opened the outer door and the mouse found its way to freedom. In a few minutes the school settled down again to peace and quiet, but Elizabeth felt most uncomfortable. She thought of what she might have said and what she did not. She knew that Miss Jewett had a right to feel annoyed and to blame her for what had happened, but she did not see how she, herself, could explain matters

now that the mischief was done. There was no explanation, she realized, and so she must suffer.

As no one had been blamed, Bert congratulated himself that both he and his sister would be let off scot-free; and at the close of the session he went out with the rest, saying to himself that it had been good fun and he was glad it came out as it did. Elizabeth had no such easy mind. She did not want to discuss the subject with the rest of the girls so she lingered behind and let them all depart ahead of her.

Miss Jewett stood at the door watching the children leave. As Elizabeth and Betsy came along she said, "Wait a moment, Elizabeth; I want to speak to you." She spoke pleasantly, but she looked grave when Elizabeth came to her. Betsy went on ahead, saying that she would wait outside.

Miss Jewett sat down at her desk and pulled up a chair for Elizabeth. For a moment neither spoke. Miss Jewett settled some papers, then, leaning on her elbows with her chin in her hands, she looked at the child before her. "Elizabeth," she said, "will you tell me what made you behave so badly this morning? It isn't like you to try to make mischief

in school and all that. I have always counted upon you and Betsy. What spirit of evil possessed you?"

"I don't know, Miss Jewett," replied Elizabeth in a subdued voice.

"Did you know that mouse was in your desk?"

"Yes, Miss Jewett."

"And that was why you didn't open it when I told you? I must confess it was a pretty good reason, but I can't see why you didn't tell me it was there."

Elizabeth couldn't see, either, except that the mouse had not entered of its own accord.

"You couldn't have put it there, of course. You couldn't have done that," continued Miss Jewett, half questioningly; but Elizabeth made no reply. Miss Jewett looked distressed. "I can scarcely believe you would wilfully do that," she went on. "Did you, Elizabeth?" she said, after a pause long enough to permit Elizabeth to reply. Still no answer came. "Did you?" repeated Miss Jewett a little more decidedly.

"I am afraid I did," Elizabeth finally replied in so low a voice that her teacher could scarcely hear her.

Miss Jewett's face fell. She sat looking at Elizabeth's downcast face which had all the expression of

one in the wrong. After a few minutes of silence Miss Jewett arose. "We'd better not say any more about this now," she said. "I am so grieved and disappointed that I don't know exactly what to say. I want to think it over, and I want you to think it over. Perhaps you can give me some explanation after awhile. Of course, Elizabeth, one looks for an apology for a thing of this kind, but I would rather wait till tomorrow, after school. You may go now."

Elizabeth walked out, the tears running down her cheeks. It was the first time she had left Miss Jewett's adored presence in such a manner. There had always been a loving kiss and a gay good-bye. What had possessed her not to explain, but to sit there and let all this wrong construction be put upon her actions? She hardly knew. She only felt that Miss Jewett should have known her better than to believe that she had planned such mischief. Appearances were against her and by some strange contrariness she had not been able to prevent it. She would not tell on Bert, that was certain; she had never been a tattler and she was not going to begin now. She walked home, being glad that Betsy had gone on ahead and that she was so late as not

to encounter any of the other girls. When she reached home she went straight to her own room and threw herself down on the bed to have her cry out. After a little while Babs came trudging up the stairs. She paused a moment at the door before she called, "Lizabef, is you comin' down to dinner?"

"I don't want any," returned Elizabeth from within.

Another pause while Babs considered this. "Muvver says you'd better come and get you dinner!" came the second call.

"Tell mother I have a headache and don't want any dinner," was the reply.

Babs went off murmuring to herself: "Has a headache; doesn't want any dinner."

Elizabeth spoke truly, for by the time her mother came up she was flushed and feverish and her head ached badly. Mrs. Hollins asked no questions, but drew down the shades and dropped a light kiss on the child's hot cheek. "Try to go to sleep, dear," she said. "I will send word by Bert that you will not be at school this afternoon." Elizabeth was usually so eager to go that her mother knew there was no pretence in this excuse of a headache.

In the darkened room where all was quiet Elizabeth finally did fall asleep, and when she awoke life did not appear quite so dreary to her. She even thought of writing a touching appeal in verse to Miss Jewett and composed the first two lines in her mind, then she decided that this was not the occasion for anything of the kind. She had been wrong and yet she had not been wrong. The next day after school she would explain in a very dignified manner and then if Miss Jewett still demanded an apology she would see. She had been misjudged and — well, no, she had not been condemned exactly. Miss Jewett had said she must think it over. She had given her a chance to make an explanation, certainly she had. Why, she had been very patient and kind when you came to think of it. Of course nobody would like to be made ridiculous before the whole school and it was very mortifying to be made to jump and scream in that way. In her calmer judgment Elizabeth saw all this and was really quite cheerful when she at last made up her mind to trust to the morrow to smooth out the tangle. "I suppose," said the little girl to herself, "if she had kissed me as she always does I wouldn't have been so sure that she was angry

with me. I got all worked up over that and thought it was much worse than it is." So she arose from her bed, washed away the traces of tears, discovered that she was very hungry and when the summons to supper came, was ready to respond with the greatest alacrity.

CHAPTER XI

BETSY IS FIRST AID TO THE INJURED FEELINGS

AS Elizabeth entered the dining-room someone jumped out from behind the door and pounced upon her. "Why, Betsy," cried Elizabeth, "when did you come?"

"Just now," returned Betsy. "I came with Hal. He is going to take supper with you all, for he and Kathie are going somewhere afterward. I asked aunt Em if I couldn't come too, and she said I might if I would not stay long afterward. Hal and Kathie promised to take me to our gate when they go down. I was so worried about you, Elizabeth, when you didn't come to school. Bert said you had a headache and I was afraid you were getting some fatal disease."

"I did have a headache," Elizabeth acknowledged, "but it is better now. I think when I have had some supper I shall feel all right. I thought supper was ready."

"I think they are waiting for your father to come in," Betsy told her. "Elizabeth, I am so anxious to know what Miss Jewett had to say to you."

"She didn't have very much to say," replied Elizabeth doubtfully. "She thinks I put the mouse in my desk on purpose to be mischievous, and she was very much hurt, so was I."

"Oh, Elizabeth, were you really? You did put the mouse there, you know."

"But I didn't do it to make fun; I did it so it would not upset the school and scare Miss Jewett."

"Why didn't you tell her so?"

"I don't know; somehow I couldn't. I got sort of rattled, I think; at first I did, and then I was mad because she thought I did it on purpose so I just wouldn't say."

Betsy was thoughtful for a moment. "I wonder how the mouse got in," she said. "I never saw one in the schoolhouse before, did you? Where was it when you picked it up, Elizabeth?"

"It was running along the top of a — a desk. It must have been cold or something, for it didn't run fast and didn't seem a bit afraid. I put my hand-kerchief over it and picked it up quite easily."

"You are going to school tomorrow, of course," said Betsy.

"Oh yes."

"And you will tell Miss Jewett that you didn't kick up a fuss on purpose."

"Maybe so,"—Elizabeth still had a remnant of hurt feelings. "She may not believe me if I do tell her."

"Oh, Elizabeth, she must. She wouldn't be so mean. When you love her so much I don't see how you can think she could be so mean."

"She loved me so much and yet she thought I could be mean," replied Elizabeth, still on the defensive. "I was hurt to the very core of my being, Betsy, and there is no balm for my wounded heart."

Just here the family appeared and the conversation ceased. Betsy was quite at home here, and was never treated as company. She now began taking some things from a chair that she might draw it up to the table. As she removed some books, Bert's lunch box clattered to the floor. Betsy picked it up and saw that there were queer holes in the bottom and that a cooky, which looked as if a mouse had nibbled it, had fallen out. Quick as a flash it

came over her that Bert was responsible for the mouse's appearance in the schoolroom, but she said nothing about it, although she thought: "That is just like Elizabeth; she wouldn't tell for fear Bert would be found out."

She felt that she had the key to the whole situation and made up her mind that Miss Jewett should know.

The opportunity for telling was soon afforded her, for when she reached home there sat Miss Jewett. "Oh," exclaimed Betsy, "were you here to supper, Miss Jewett?"

"I feel quite sure of it," returned her teacher with a smile.

"Why didn't they tell me you were coming?" said Betsy, aggrieved. "I wouldn't have gone out if I had known."

"Maybe that is why they didn't tell," said Miss Jewett with a little twinkle in her eye.

Betsy did not know quite how to take this, so she said nothing.

"Did you find Elizabeth better?" said Miss Jewett, somewhat formally.

"Yes, she was much better," Betsy answered.

“She will be well enough to come to school to-morrow.”

Miss Jewett did not answer. She seemed to be thinking deeply. Presently she said, “Betsy, I wonder if you can throw any light on this matter of Elizabeth and the mouse. Did she really bring it to school with her? I know she is full of fun and likes to do unusual things, but I could scarce believe my ears when she told me that she put it in her desk herself.”

“Of course she didn’t bring it to school,” — Betsy spoke indignantly. “She saw it running across a desk and she jumped up and caught it so as to prevent a disturbance. She told me all about it this evening.”

“Why, Betsy, is that true? Then why in the world didn’t she tell me?”

“I don’t know; she said she was sort of rattled; and then, you won’t be mad, Miss Jewett, she was proud and didn’t see how you could suspect her of doing it.”

“Oh, but I am sorry,” returned Miss Jewett. “She didn’t deny that she had put it in her desk, and I didn’t care to question further, for I was feel-

ing rather hurt myself. Did you see her catch it, Betsy?"

"I saw her jump up suddenly and then I saw her pop something in her desk. I heard it running around but I didn't know at first what it was."

"Dear me, dear me," murmured Miss Jewett. "I wish she had told me."

"Miss Jewett," said Betsy presently, "if I tell you a secret, will you promise not to let anyone know? I hate to be a telltale, but I want you to know just how fine Elizabeth really is. She would rather take the blame herself than have the real person suffer."

"Oh dear, Betsy, that is asking a good deal. Perhaps I should not make such a promise, yet if it exonerates Elizabeth I should be glad to know. Yes, I will keep the secret."

"I will tell you what I think and why I think it," began Betsy, and went on to relate how she had discovered the lunch box with the nibbled cake and all the rest of it, ending up with: "It would be just like Bert to do it; he is so full of mischief. Why, last year he brought a little grass snake to school and almost frightened Miss Dunbar out of her wits

by putting it on the ledge under the black-board. She caught him, though, and he had to stay in for days and days after school and learn lines and lines of something or other."

"He deserves to be well punished now," declared Miss Jewett, "but as we have only what is called circumstantial evidence I suppose he must escape. I am glad you told me, however, for I am pretty sure you are right, and when I see Elizabeth I shall be able to use more diplomacy. Poor Elizabeth, to think that she took it so to heart."

"She said that it wouldn't have seemed so terrible if you had kissed her good-bye as you always did before. She seemed to feel worse about that than anything else. She thought that meant that you had stopped loving her."

"The blessed child, of course I haven't stopped loving her."

"May I tell her that you send your love to her and good-night? I can speak to her over the 'phone, you know."

"Yes, do tell her that and ask her to come to school early so I can have a word with her before work begins. I must go and put on my things now, for

you know there is an entertainment at the Hall and we are all going."

"You mean you grown-ups; we children are not. Hal and Kathie have gone already."

As soon as the front door closed after her elders Betsy went to the telephone, called up Elizabeth and delivered Miss Jewett's message. Elizabeth's answer came back: "Oh, I am so joyful. I shall sleep a sweet and dreamless slumber tonight, Betsy. You are a friend indeed to pour the oil of gladness upon my bruised and bleeding heart. I certainly will start to school early. What? Yes, I have studied them, for, even if I had no heart to acquire any more knowledge, I felt that I must do my duty to my parents no matter how I suffered. Good-night, dearest Phillipa, your Frederica wafts you a kiss."

True to her promise, Elizabeth started off betimes to school the next morning. She did not stop for Betsy as usual, believing that she would not have finished breakfast, and as for Bess it was quite positive that she would still be at table for she loved to linger till the last moment. Miss Jewett greeted her with a smile. Elizabeth was the first arrival, as she hoped she would be. The schoolroom was fresh

and bright, cheery with warmth of sun and blazing fire. Some scarlet geraniums in the window were beginning to put forth blossoms, while a great poinsettia, a Christmas gift to Miss Jewett, still showed its large and brilliant flowers amidst the green of palms and ferns.

"Good-morning, Elizabeth," said Miss Jewett brightly. "Come up here and let us straighten out that unfortunate misunderstanding. You foolish child, why didn't you tell me yesterday how it happened that you put the mouse in your desk? I might never have known if it had not been for Betsy. To be sure, I should have gone deeper into the matter and have inquired your motive, but I thought the least said the soonest mended, and after you had acknowledged that you put it there I thought that settled it. I am sorry, dear."

"I suppose I should have told you," answered Elizabeth, "but somehow I couldn't. I felt all twisted up and contrary, and the more you talked about it the worse it was till at last I couldn't have said anything if I had tried."

"I see. And you captured the mouse simply to save me a scare and the school a disturbance?"

"Yes, Miss Jewett, although—" Elizabeth hesitated; but she was too honest not to go on, "although I was kind of half glad to have it happen: it made such a nice excitement."

"But it was not your intention to start such an excitement," replied Miss Jewett with a smile, "and that is the main point. It has not been such a long time since I was a schoolgirl for me to forget that any interruption of routine is welcome. We'll call it square, Elizabeth, if you like. I think we were both a little wrong. Come and give me a good hug and kiss before anyone comes."

Elizabeth did not hesitate to respond to the invitation, receiving as hearty a hug as she gave. "I think it was because I love you so much that I felt so badly," she whispered.

"Dear child," murmured Miss Jewett. "Hereafter we must speak right out, dear, and not allow any more misunderstandings." Then two or three children came trooping in and Elizabeth went to her seat feeling very happy.

Believing that Elizabeth's part in the yesterday's disturbance might not be known, Miss Jewett took pains to inform the school of the little girl's motives

and at the same time she gave a lecture which was really aimed at Bert who felt most uneasy when he learned how unhappy he had made his sister. Indeed, Betsy took it upon herself to charge him with being the guilty one.

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, Bert Hollins," she began at recess when she could get him out of hearing of the others. "I know it was you who brought the mouse to school, for I saw the holes in your lunch box and the cooky that the mouse had nibbled. Don't you know that Elizabeth got the whole blame for it, and cried herself sick about it? She wasn't such a sneaky coward as to allow the blame to fall on you where it belonged and she let Miss Jewett believe it was she who did it just to keep you out of trouble."

"Gee!" exclaimed Bert, "I didn't know that. I vow I didn't, Betsy. Was that why she didn't eat any dinner and didn't go to school in the afternoon?"

"It was exactly that, if you must know, and I should think you would be ashamed to let a girl be braver than you; I wouldn't if I were a boy."

Bert got very red in the face. There was nothing he resented so much as an attack upon his courage.

He stood looking very glum while Betsy berated him. "What do you expect me to do?" he said at last.

"What any manly and gentlemanly person would do," returned Betsy with dignity, and walked away, having had her say.

Bert stood there in a most uncomfortable state of mind. The subject which he thought at rest had come back upon him like a boomerang. If Betsy knew he wondered if Miss Jewett did likewise. Of course Betsy had only guessed at it for he had not actually admitted that she was right. He wondered if Elizabeth was still under suspicion and he eyed her very closely when the return to his seat gave him an opportunity. She seemed as usual. He could see no traces of unhappiness in her face, but she knew and Betsy knew, so it was up to him to do something. He wouldn't let a girl have more courage than he had. It was fine of Elizabeth, of course, but he almost wished she hadn't put him in this position, for now he had two things to answer for instead of one. He had begun the mischief and had let her take the blame. Well, of course no man could allow that. All afternoon Bert was most saintly, so much so that

Miss Jewett felt that Betsy was right in her suspicions. He went out with the rest, for Miss Jewett had no intention of calling him to account.

However, the schoolroom was scarcely emptied before Bert appeared in the doorway. He stood there twirling his cap and looking most uneasy.

"Well, Bert," said Miss Jewett encouragingly.

"It was me," said Bert doggedly, if ungrammatically. "I was the fellow that let that mouse out. I brought him to school on purpose to have some fun; it wasn't Elizabeth at all."

"I know that," Miss Jewett said calmly, "and I was pretty sure of the guilty person, but on Elizabeth's account I overlooked it. It was pretty good of her, don't you think, Bert, to try to shield you?"

"It was, sure," replied Bert. "She's the stuff, but I 'most wish she hadn't."

"You think that since she did not succeed in preventing a disturbance it would have been better all around? Well, I think so too, so far as that one thing was concerned, but it has done something else which I think is more worth while. It has proved to you and to me that she is loyal to her brother and to me, that she has courage, moral courage, which is

the best kind, and so we have learned how absolutely she is to be depended upon."

"She's all right," repeated Bert.

"It has proved to me another thing that I might not have found out," Miss Jewett went on: "it has shown me that you have moral courage, too, and that you are not willing to let your sister shoulder the blame which is really yours. That is worth while knowing, too, Bert. I am mighty glad of that. So, because it would grieve your sister to know that in spite of her efforts you were punished, and because of one or two other things, we are going to close the subject right now. But, listen, Bert, if ever you do such a thing again — " Miss Jewett did not say what would happen but by the expression of her face Bert knew he would not be let off easily.

He stood for a minute not knowing exactly what to say. He had had something of a lecture, to be sure, but he had been commended for having the courage to own up. He did not feel that he could depart with flying colors, exactly, yet he was not in disgrace, nor was there any occasion to show defiance. Probably the best thing was to show neither the mien of conqueror nor of vanquished, but to take his

leave in a polite but firmly resolute manner. So he bowed and said pleasantly: "Good-evening, Miss Jewett. I don't believe I will bother with bringing any more mice to school." Then he went without a moment's delay, leaving Miss Jewett shaking with laughter.

"They are so ridiculous, those two Hollins children," she said to herself. "I wonder if I will get through the year with any dignity left. Teaching does take it out of one, but I must say that at times there are compensations. I wish I could tell exactly what was passing through that youngster's mind when he went out in that absurd way."

It did not make the slightest difference to Bert whether she knew or not; his whole feeling was of relief at having put an unpleasant interview behind him. There was but one more thing required of him and that could be made short work of. He put his intention into effect at the very first moment he could. There was no need of appearing anything but lordly before his own sister, so with hands in his pockets, he sauntered into Elizabeth's presence.

He found her absorbed in studying her lessons for the next day, being fired with new ambition after

the reconciliation. "I say," said Bert, breaking in upon the doings of the English kings.

"Oh, what do you want, Bert," said Elizabeth impatiently. "Can't you see I am studying my lessons?"

"I just wanted to say that I am much obliged to you for being so decent about that mouse business. I told Miss Jewett that it was my doings."

"Oh, Bert, and what did she do?"

"Oh nothing. I told her I wouldn't bring any more to school." Then Bert sauntered out with the air of having disposed of a very trifling matter. But Elizabeth understood.

CHAPTER XII

THE ARTIST

IT was one afternoon early in March that Elizabeth started out to look for pussywillows. She went alone, for she wanted to be the one to make this first spring offering to her teacher. She could not, like Betsy, supply her with flowers from a conservatory, nor had she such a weekly allowance as Bess, who could, once in awhile, commission Hal to send violets from town, but these firstlings of the year were hers for the gathering, if only she could find them. She thought she knew a place where some of the brave little furry buds might have put out sooner than their neighbors and to this spot she took her way.

It was the first day which had suggested a promise of spring. There was a pleasant warmth in the air, a smell of fresh earth. Under the brown leaves were tiny green growths beginning to push up.

Some patches of snow still lingered in northbound

corners, but the little streams had broken from their bonds and were murmuring along singing of all sorts of pleasant things to Elizabeth, who had a knowledge of their speech and could interpret what they were saying. It was all about spring and green grasses, birds' nests and flowers. The ground was soft in places, but, for a wonder, Elizabeth had put on rubbers and sprang over the marshy spots without getting over the tops of her shoes. She loved to scour the woods and fields with Betsy, but once in awhile she revelled in being alone, and today she especially enjoyed it. She stood still once or twice to listen to a bluebird and by keeping very quiet at last caught sight of the flash of blue which told of his presence.

"I see you," she called as he flew away, "and I know what you are singing about. I know what the brook says, too. It is a spring song, and I am so glad, so glad. I am happy, you bluebird! I am happy, you brook," she sang. "It's a gladsome day in this quiet nook! That is my song. I made it up. I am an improvisatrice. Oh!"

After the exclamation she stopped her song and dashed through the bushes, regardless of how briars snatched at her and muddy pools splashed her frock.

"There you are! you dear things," she cried. "I thought I would find you out. I will not take all of you, but I will take enough to make a company so you will not be lonely. I hope you like to go, and maybe you will like it better when you get there, for the schoolroom is really very pleasant, and you will have the honor of standing on Miss Jewett's desk; that should compensation for all else. You are not so very far out yet, but if you are put in water in the warm room you will soon show more fur. I know just the vase Miss Jewett will put you in, and you will look lovely. You are the very first, the very first, and I found you."

She chattered away as she broke off the twigs, finally saying, "There, I think that is enough. I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Pussywillow, for letting me take some of your pretty buds. I will come to see you again some day." Then she climbed up the slope stretching down to the brook, looking from time to time with much satisfaction at the little gray fuzzy buds.

When she reached the top of the hill she paused for a moment that she might determine upon the best way, and then started to cross the field diag-

onally. Just before she reached the corner of the fence she stopped short, surprised to see before her a young man sitting on a camp-stool with a black box in his lap. Elizabeth was curious to know what he could be doing, and began to move slowly nearer to him until she came within his line of vision.

The young man looked over the top of his box at her. "Good-evening, Aurora," he said.

Supposing that he mistook her for someone else, Elizabeth made reply: "My name isn't Aurora."

"It isn't? I should have thought it was. Then you are a woodland elf and live down in those woods that you have just come from. It was just a case of mistaken identity; that was all. Good-evening, Elfie."

Elizabeth smiled. This was certainly a very unusual young man. Some persons might have said he was crazy, but Elizabeth recognized a kindred spirit. "Good-evening," she said, encouraged to draw a little nearer that she might see what he was really doing.

But before she reached him the young man arose, set his box on the stool and stood off at a few paces, squinting at it with half-closed eyes. Then he made

a sudden dash forward, made a dab at the lid of the box and returned to the place he had been standing. "Come here," he said, "and tell me what you think of it."

Elizabeth obeyed the invitation with alacrity and saw that the young man held a palette and brushes and that in the top of his box was fastened a small canvas upon which he had been working. All these things were quite new to Elizabeth. She was familiar with her sister's box of water-colors, but this paraphernalia was strange. She reached the young man's side and looked at the canvas with pleased eyes. "Why, it is a picture," she said.

"You don't say so," returned the young man. "Is it really?"

"What else could it be?" said Elizabeth, a little puzzled.

"Oh, it might be a chart of the county or a section of a map, or almost anything. It might be something like this." He picked up a clean canvas from the pile on the ground and began to draw swiftly with a stump of charcoal. "This might be the main road," he said, "and these the branch roads and these the houses." He rubbed his drawing in two or three

places and then turned the canvas so Elizabeth could see.

“Why, it looks just like a bunch of pussywillows,” she exclaimed in surprise.

“Does it? How funny. Can’t you see the main road, and the little roads? Those round spots are the houses.” He looked down with a smile, and Elizabeth understood that he had really meant it to be a branch of pussywillows, the buds being the houses.

She gave him an answering smile. “But the other is a truly picture,” she said; “this is an enigmatical one.”

“Lovely,” cried the young man, laughing. “I like that word ‘enigmatical,’ and I shall take it into my vocabulary.” He looked down at Elizabeth again with a broad smile. “By the way,” he said, “did you ever hear of Titian?”

Elizabeth was doubtful. The name sounded familiar and yet she thought best not to display any knowledge lest she might make a mistake. “I think I have heard of him,” she said. “Who is he?”

“A painter.”

“Oh, are you he?” She thought he might very

well be and that this was his way of informing her.

“Ye gods and little fishes!” cried the young man. “Listen to her. Do I look as if I were over three hundred years old?” he asked.

“Oh,” — Elizabeth was quite abashed. “I didn’t remember that he was so old.”

“He lived over three hundred years ago,” continued the young man, “but if he were here now he would probably say to you, ‘My dear demoiselle, will you oblige me by taking off your cap and sitting over there where the sun can shine on your lovely head?’ Only he would say it in Italian, for he probably couldn’t speak English.”

Elizabeth pulled down the rim of her cap closer over her curling locks. She was afraid the young man was making fun of her.

“What are you doing that for?” asked the artist. “Don’t you like your hair?”

“I hate it,” said Elizabeth in low, tense tones. “I should like to dye it black or brown or even green.”

“Oh no, not green; you wouldn’t really rather have it green. It would make you so conspicuous.”

“Yes, even green. Nobody likes red hair. My

family and my friends try to comfort me by saying it is auburn, but I know, myself, that it is red, for the people that don't like me always say so."

"Then it is because they are mean and jealous. The great Titian adored hair the color of yours and painted lovely females with just such many, many times."

"Did he really?" Elizabeth said in delighted surprise. "I wish I could see some of them."

"Perhaps you will some day. I have a copy of one. I wish I had it here to convince you. I did it when I was abroad and they say it is a pretty good copy, Elfie, if I do say it as shouldn't."

"I would give anything to see it," declared Elizabeth, "and I wish Corinne Barker could see it, too."

"Why, Corinne?" inquired the artist, beginning to pack up his paints and brushes.

"Oh, because she is so — so — snippy and hateful. She makes fun of my hair whenever she can, and tries to make everyone think I am a sight." She did not know why she was disposed to be so confidential with this perfect stranger, but somehow he invited confidence.

"Then no doubt she is consumed with jealousy,"

her new friend remarked. "I will venture to say that she has dull, mouse-colored hair herself, dry, wispy hair that hangs down in little strings around her face and never looks tidy. I will bet you that I can make a portrait of her without seeing her." He picked up the canvas on which he had drawn the pussywillows, dusted off the charcoal and began sketching rapidly. "There," he said, when he had worked for a very few minutes, "doesn't that look just like her?" He showed Elizabeth the drawing he had made. It was a face with a most disagreeable and contemptuous expression. Little strings of hair fell over the forehead and the eyebrows were lifted in disdain.

Elizabeth did not like to say that it was not an exact likeness, but she laughed at the funny drawing and said, "She has just that supercilious expression."

The young man put down the canvas and looked at Elizabeth gravely. "Those attacks are entirely too frequent for a young person of your size," he said. "Where do you go to school?"

"I go to the village school, but next year I expect to go to the Academy."

"Will you tell your teacher for me that you have

the most remarkable vocabulary and that you are a credit to her system. I suppose you live near here, Elfie?"

"Yes, I live in the brown house just at the edge of the town."

"I don't know the place very well. I came over today from Ferny with one Hiram Sollers. He said it was 'pretty sightly to Brookdale.'" The imitation of the old farmer's dialect was perfect and Elizabeth laughed.

"I have come to the conclusion that Hiram was right," continued the artist. "I believe I would like to knock about here for awhile. I should like mighty to paint you, Elfie."

"Me? What for?" Elizabeth showed her surprise.

"Dear innocent, because I feel the mantle of Titian falling upon my shoulders, I suppose. I can't imagine any other reason. I might stick a suggestion of you in this picture I am starting; you and your pussywillows would come in nicely. Suppose you go over there for a minute, just there where the sun is shining. I won't keep you long. Oh dear, you must take off your cap. I don't want the glory

of that auroral halo to be lost. That's it. Now look this way for a minute. Good! Hold the bunch of pussies in your arms this way. That's it." He worked away earnestly and rapidly for several minutes. The time seemed very long to Elizabeth, although she was buoyed up by the excitement of going through such an unusual experience. At last she shifted her position, becoming more and more restless, and wondering how much longer she would have to stand.

"There, time's up," said the young man at last. "You did pretty well. It's no fun to be a model, I know. How would you like to be at it all day? Some persons earn their living that way you know."

Elizabeth thought it must be a very tiresome way of making one's living and was glad she did not have to do it. She came back to see what the artist had made of her, and was rather disappointed to see a few daubs which did not represent a true likeness of Elizabeth Hollins, she thought.

"If you stand off a little it will look more like," suggested her friend.

Elizabeth went off a short distance and, to her

surprise, found that there was a distinct image of a little girl with shining hair standing in the background of the picture. "Why, that does look like me," she exclaimed.

"You didn't think it possible, did you, Elfie? Well, we all have to learn. I will try to finish this up tomorrow. Shall we walk your way? You can show me where you live and then I will go on to the Mansion House. I cannot say that I would be overcome with joy if I had to think of staying there long, but it is the best there is, I am told."

"It is rather smelly," Elizabeth acknowledged. "I shouldn't like to live there myself."

"Smelly, my dear Elfie? I am surprised. Why not malodorous or mephitic, or some such adjective. One who follows the style of the respected Dr. Johnson should not use such a very ordinary word as smelly. Now, if I said smelly, it would be all right, for I do not aim at anything but extreme simplicity in speech as in other things."

Elizabeth felt that he was making fun of her, but he did it so good-naturedly that she could not take offence, so she only laughed and they walked on, the artist carrying his box in one hand and a lot of wet

brushes in the other. Elizabeth wondered why he did not put the brushes in the box.

As if reading her thoughts, the young man said: "If I don't carry my brushes in this way I may forget to wash them; I sometimes do and then don't I have a time to get them clean? By the way, Elfie, I have not properly introduced myself." He picked up a shining brown leaf from the ground, selected a brush which still held some red paint, and with it wrote on the leaf which he handed gravely to Elizabeth.

She took it gingerly so as not to rub off the paint. What a delightful man he was, to be sure, and how unlike any other person she had met. She looked earnestly at what he had written. It was: "Oliver Kemp, a reincarnation of Titian." Elizabeth had not the slightest idea what reincarnation meant, and she looked up questioningly to see laughter in the young man's eyes, so she knew it was a sort of joke, but she determined to keep the leaf as a treasure. She held it very carefully by the stem, carrying her pussywillows in the other hand. "You don't know my name," she said presently.

"Oh, yes, I do: it is Elfie."

"You have the first two letters right," said Elizabeth gayly.

"That is quite enough; I needn't try for any more. It is a great satisfaction to get things partly right: I don't always do it, I know," he added, partly to himself.

They had reached the long street by this time and Mr. Kemp stood still and looked up and down, toward the church spire, the white, brown or red houses, the rows of trees each side the street in one direction and, in the other, hills, forests and winding road. "Do you know, Elfie," he said, "I like this village of yours and I should like to stay here for awhile. Do you know of any place like a chicken-coop or a wood-house or any little cubby where I could keep my stool and easel and where I could paint when it was too cold or too stormy to go out?"

"A chicken-coop wouldn't be big enough," returned Elizabeth in all gravity, "but maybe a hen-house would do. I don't exactly think of any just now, but maybe I could hear of something."

"That's a good child; I wish you would. I will come up tomorrow and find out. You live, — let me see, where is it you live?"

“In that brown house off there at the end of the street,” — Elizabeth pointed it out to him.

“Of course; I might have known it would be brown, like a tree. I suppose you go in there only when it is very cold or stormy and stay in the woods the rest of the time; elves always do, you know.”

Elizabeth laughed. “I do like to stay out as much as I can,” she made answer, “but I love the woods and the fields better in warm weather than in cold.”

“And have you a hollow stump where you stay sometimes?”

“Yes, I really have one; it is in the little hollow behind the house; I call it the Fairy Dell.”

“Of course you do; I could have vouched for that.”

“There is another place,” — Elizabeth felt encouraged to go on, — “It is on top of the hill; there are great bowlders there and the witches come there at midnight.”

“How truly fascinating. You must show me the spot some day.”

“But,” Elizabeth went on, “I have a lovely place in the attic all my own; it is under the eaves and there is a nice window there that looks out over the country. Sometimes I make believe that it is a

window high up in a moated castle tower and sometimes I pretend it is a really fairy lodge in the tree-tops."

"Bless you, Elfie; you are a creature after my own heart. I will go to the gate with you and you can show me the window."

Elizabeth readily agreed and when they had reached the brown house she pointed out the little window in the pointed gable, a wistaria vine clambered to it and would soon be ready to put out its first leaves.

"It looks exactly as I thought it must," declared Mr. Kemp. "I am coming to see you tomorrow, Elfie. I suppose it must be after school is out."

"Oh yes, for I shall not be at home till then," returned Elizabeth soberly.

He put down his box to shake hands while she laid aside her pussywillows. Then they parted and Elizabeth, brimming over with excitement, hurried into the house.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STUDIO

ELIZABETH rushed panting into her mother's presence. "Such an adventure,"—she gasped. "Never in my wildest moments did I ever dream of such a delicious encounter; that I, of all people, should be so highly favored is almost incomprehensible."

"If there are any adventures floating around I'll be bound you will lasso one," said Kathie, amused at Elizabeth's manner of announcement. "What are those? Pussywillows, as I live! I didn't know they were out. Give them to me and I will put them in water; they will be nice for the table."

But Elizabeth held on to her treasures. "I got them for Miss Jewett," she said. "You can't have them, Kathie."

"Well, I do think you might think of your own home first," returned Kathie.

"The other girls all have such lovely things to give her," complained Elizabeth. "Betsy has flowers from the conservatory and Bess has money enough to send to town for any she wants to give, but I have only what I can find myself. I did want to take these because they are the very first and nobody else has thought of them. Do I have to give them up, mother?"

"Let her do as she pleases with them, Kathie," said Mrs. Hollins. "She has a right to them and you should not interfere with her little innocent plans. What is this about an adventure, Elizabeth?"

"I have met an artist, a real live artist," she said, sitting up with shining eyes. "It was just after I found the pussywillows. I came across him as he was sitting painting, and, oh mother, he put me in the picture; he really did."

"Are you sure you are not making this up?" asked Kathie.

"No, indeed, I am not. I can prove it to you; for here is his valuable name. Be careful," she warned, as she held out the leaf, "the paint is not dry yet."

"Paint?" Kathie exclaimed, taking the leaf in her hand and reading the name. "Why, Elizabeth, he

must be some sort of crazy creature to be calling himself a reincarnation of Titian."

"Oh, that part is just a joke," returned Elizabeth. "He said there was an artist named Titian who liked red hair. I didn't know that he lived such a long, long time ago and I asked Mr. Kemp if he were Titian; that was before I knew his name. Did you ever hear of Titian, mother?"

"Why, yes, dear, of course I have. He was a very famous man, and his pictures now bring fabulous prices."

"Tell us some more about your discovery," said Kathie, now really interested.

"He is very nice and jolly," Elizabeth went on, "and he likes it here in Brookdale. He came over from Ferny and is staying at the Mansion House."

"Poor thing, I am sorry for him," remarked Kathie.

"Oh, he doesn't like it himself. He asked me if I knew of a chicken-coop or something little where he could put his easel and things."

"Oh, he wants a studio, does he? I don't know where he will find one in this place," said Mrs. Hollins.

"It would be rather a distinction to have an artist among us," remarked Kathie. "Of course he was just in fun when he said a chicken-coop, Elizabeth; he would want something larger and with a good light. Can you think of any place, mother?"

"Why, no, nothing occurs to me just now; I may think of something later on. We will ask your father."

"He is coming to see me tomorrow, Mr. Kemp is," Elizabeth spoke up. "He thought maybe I would hear of some place by then."

"Well, I declare," responded Kathie, "you have rushed into a friendship sure enough; the next thing he will be wanting to paint your portrait"; she spoke half mockingly.

"Oh, he has already said he would like to," Elizabeth said calmly.

"Well, well,"—Kathie looked at her with new interest. Being a pretty girl herself she had never thought that Elizabeth would attract the eye of an artist as she was very unlike her sister. "We shall certainly have to inquire around and see what we can do for him."

"We shall have to inquire around and find out

something about the young man himself," said Mrs. Hollins.

After all it was Elizabeth who made the discovery of a suitable studio, or at least of a place which could be turned into one. Probably less ingenious persons than herself and Mr. Kemp would never have thought of it, but these two saw its possibilities when they went on a search in company.

The young man appeared as he had promised, the next afternoon. Elizabeth proudly presented him to her mother and father, who were not long in satisfying themselves that he was a gentleman, that he was well known by certain of their acquaintances in the nearby town and that they need have no hesitation in admitting him into their circle. He was very nice and courteous to Kathie, but it was evidently Elizabeth whom he had selected as chief friend and, later on, she was permitted to go off with him to hunt up a studio.

They tried the village first, but here there were only one or two possibilities, a small house with a dreary outlook, a loft over a store, where it was noisy and inconvenient.

"Won't do, Elfie," said Mr. Kemp, shaking his

head. "I must be 'far from the madding crowd,' and I must have a north light, or at least a place where I could put in a window on the north side if necessary."

"Why do you want it on the north side? It is so cold there in winter. Do you like the north better than any other place?"

"No, my child, I do not, but be it known to you that the light varies less, the sun doesn't gallop around so recklessly and doesn't throw such exasperating reflections and shadows on your canvas."

Elizabeth didn't understand why this should make any very great difference, but it did seem a reason from an artist's point of view and she accepted it. She felt that she might learn many new things if this lately acquired friend should remain with them.

They had wandered up and down the road, had peered in at the out-buildings of more than one small farm, and finally returned by the back road to Elizabeth's own home. "That is where my cousin Ruth lives," said Elizabeth, pointing out a gray stone house plainly seen through the bare trees. "It is a very pretty place. We can go through it,

if you like, for there is a little gate just ahead. I think you would like to see the old spring with the little statue over it and there is a lovely view from the summer-house."

"Let us go by all means," agreed Mr. Kemp; "I am interested in fine views and 'the old spring with a statue' sounds most alluring."

"My cousins aren't here now," Elizabeth told him; "but they are coming back soon. Ruth had the measles and had to go to Florida for the winter, but as soon as the weather is warm enough they will come back."

They entered through the little gate and first visited the spring from which issued a small stream which went purling down the hill. The spring had been restoned and the little statue, although somewhat weather-stained, was in pretty good condition. "There," exclaimed Elizabeth proudly, "isn't that lovely? Ruth and I discovered it first, and we like this place to play in better than any."

"It is rather nice," said the young man, looking around critically. "A little too much cleaned up to be really artistic, you know; but it isn't half bad. I wouldn't mind making a study of it; I suppose

there would be no objection to my coming in here to do it while the family are away."

"Oh, I am sure you may," returned Elizabeth. "We keep the keys of the house, but there is a man who looks after the place and the animals. He lives in the new garage; he has a room over it."

Mr. Kemp stepped to this side and that, looking at the spring from different points of view, gazing through his half-closed hand in a way that he had, and which Elizabeth was learning to imitate.

"Now, let's go to the summer-house," said Elizabeth, leading the way to the top of the hill; "it is all fixed over and Grandpa Gil likes to come up here and sit."

"Well, I say, this is stunning," remarked Mr. Kemp when they had reached the spot. "Not very paintable, perhaps, but it gives you a mighty good idea of the surrounding country. I say, Elfie, what is that down there?"

Elizabeth looked in the direction he indicated. "Why, that," she told him, "is where the old farmhouse used to be; it was burned down and that is only the foundation. Cousin Tom didn't rebuild it, because the garage is nearer and has all the room that is needed."

"I didn't mean the foundation, although with vines and underbrush growing over it I imagine it is rather picturesque, but what I was looking at was the small building near it; what is that?"

"Why, I don't know exactly; they don't use it now. I think it was a sort of stable first and then they used it for the chickens." She broke off abruptly and gave a little squeal. "Oh, Mr. Titian, maybe we have found it."

"That is just what I was thinking, Elfie; let's go and see."

They lost no time in rushing toward the old weather-beaten building which stood on the side of the hill quite a distance from the main house. A large tree sheltered it on the south side, but on the north and west the view was unobstructed. A little path led from it to the spring. It was rather dilapidated, windows broken and roof leaky. Mr. Kemp went around to see if there might be a door unfastened or a shutter loose, and at last he found a place where they could get in. Elizabeth thought it the greatest fun to be boosted up over the sill of the window, where they made their entrance, and to land on the dusty floor inside. "We are like discoverers,"

she said. "It is pretty bad, isn't it? Such a lot of cobwebs, and you can look up and see daylight right through some of the holes in the roof, and it is rather malodorous from the chickens."

Mr. Kemp laughed. "You got it, didn't you, that time. I say, Elfie, it isn't half so bad as it looks. A few shingles will make the roof all right, I think. I could knock out a place over here, you see, and put in a couple of window-sashes and I would have a good light. There over in that corner I could carry that partition all the way up and make a sort of kitchenette or something of the sort. There seems to be a solid floor over the greater part of it, and — yes, there is a ladder, as I live; I'll go up and see what it looks like above there. No, don't you come; you might fall."

He raised the ladder, ran lightly up, and through the apertures made by the absence of boards Elizabeth could see him above. "Not bad," he called down to her. "With a little work one could make a fair room up here."

He came down presently and Elizabeth begged to go part way so she could look around. This she was permitted to do, Mr. Kemp standing

below telling her he would catch her if she should fall.

“There is quite good head room,” he said, “much more than you would suppose. Why, Elfie, one could really live here and be quite comfortable in mild weather. For an impecunious artist it would be ideal. Now, how do you suppose we’d better go about getting it? I can do all the repairing myself, and they wouldn’t be likely to charge much rent, would they?”

“If they would rent it at all,” returned Elizabeth a little doubtfully.

“I wouldn’t interfere with them: I would be very unobtrusive,” Mr. Kemp went on in a boyish way. “Do you suppose your father would take it upon himself to dicker for it on my behalf?”

“I don’t know,” Elizabeth answered; “but it wouldn’t do any harm to ask him.”

“Well, let’s go and do it now,” suggested the young man. “The sooner the better for me. To tell you the truth, Elfie, the Mansion House is getting on my nerves. The coffee this morning was something indescribable, and I don’t know whether it was leather, old boot-tops, the binding of a discarded

book, or a worn-out saddle that they served up as steak."

"Oh dear!" This description aroused Elizabeth's pity and she was ready to do anything in order to release her friend from such a condition. So they scrambled out of the window again, looking back more than once at the building on the side of the hill.

"What is the name of your cousins?" asked Mr. Kemp as they went toward Elizabeth's home.

"Gilmore," she told him. "Cousin Tom Gilmore is the one who owns the place."

"I don't suppose by any stretch of the imagination it could be any relation to the Tom Gilmore who married Belle Darby."

"Why, yes it is. At least cousin Tom's wife is cousin Belle."

"His father is a tall old gentleman, has trouble with his eyes, has been living in California?"

"Why yes, that is Grandpa Gil. He is a great friend of mine."

"Hurrah!" Mr. Kemp tossed up his hat and shouted joyously. "It's all right, Elfie; I am sure of it, for one of the Gilmore boys married my cousin

and we have known them all our lives. I didn't know Tom Gilmore was living here."

"They haven't been very long," Elizabeth told him. "They only came last year. It is cousin Belle who is my mother's first cousin. Why, we are sort of related, aren't we?"

"Certainly we are. I say, Elfie, but this is great. I had no idea I was falling upon such luck. I will telegraph to Tom myself and I am sure it will be all right."

And so it proved to be. The telegram was sent off without delay and the answer came back: "Go ahead. It is yours. Make yourself at home."

Mr. Kemp came rushing up with the news to Elizabeth. "Now, Elfie," he said, "you have got to help me and when everything is finished we will give a tea and invite some of our friends."

"How entrancing!" exclaimed Elizabeth, clasping her hands over her breast. "Mr. Titian, you are a gem of purest ray serene."

He had fallen into her manner of speech by now and usually matched her high-flown language by something even more grandiloquent. "And you, my dear Elfie," he said, "shall be the reigning sovereign

of my sylvan retreat. I may as well confess to you at the outset," he went on, "that I am wondering how I shall furnish my modest abode when it is put into habitable condition."

Elizabeth knitted her brows over this problem. "I suppose you haven't a great deal of money," she said hesitatingly, for she did not want to hurt his feelings. "I am, alas, in the same impoverished condition, but if twenty-five cents would do you any good I will gladly add that to your store."

"Elfie, you are too much for me," returned the young man gravely. "Bless your dear little heart! I don't know anyone I would rather borrow from, but I won't ask you to lend yet. We will see how well we can manage first. Of course you knew long ago that I was not rolling in wealth. In fact, it took my bottom dollar to get me through my trip to Europe, but it was well worth it. I am rather resourceful and I can manage, even if I have to sleep on a pile of straw."

This seemed poverty indeed to Elizabeth and she determined to consult her mother about certain discarded articles in the attic. This she did that very

evening, but in the meantime Mr. Kemp had made the joyous announcement of his connection with the Gilmore family and had been accepted as something more than an ordinary acquaintance. He had met many of the young people and was considered a great addition to their circle, for he was merry and entertaining, good-tempered and thoughtful, so was included in all social affairs of the neighborhood and was frequently invited out to dinner; consequently the fare at the Mansion House became less of a grievance.

Therefore it happened that when Elizabeth began to make her inquiries about the odd pieces of cast-off furniture Kathie was ready to lend a hand.

"Oh, do let him have any of that old stuff," she begged. "We must fix him up somehow. Probably he will want to use it only for awhile anyhow. What is there up there, mother?"

Mrs. Hollins considered. "Well, let me see; there is a table with a broken leg, two or three rickety chairs and things of that kind. There is an old four-poster bedstead, too, but he would hardly want that."

"He might," declared Kathie; "we will ask him, anyhow."

The upshot of the matter was that contributions came in from near and far. The young people began to be interested at once, and were eager to have a hand in furnishing the studio, so one and another hunted up odds and ends of furniture. The Paines rooted out an old bureau from their attic and that was the beginning of a collection which included a mattress, pillows, curtains, covers, rugs, odd dishes, and ended up with a kerosene oil stove. All these were mounted upon a wagon and one Saturday morning appeared a procession of young folks following the wagon to its destination. Neal Paine, Dick Hollins, Hal Tyson, and some others had lent a hand toward the repairing of the old building and were on the premises when the wagon approached. Elizabeth, of course, was there and was the one who first spied the troop.

"Look what's coming!" she cried out.

The workers inside speedily rushed out, and the goods were dumped on the ground amid much laughter and joking. The girls insisted upon helping to clean the rooms and worked with a will, so that

before the day was over the little house really looked cosey and as if it had been lived in by "somebody besides chickens," Elizabeth said. Thus was the studio of Oliver Kemp established and many good times did it see.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MODEL

THE studio soon became a most fascinating spot to many others besides Elizabeth. Mr. Kemp was very ingenious and had a knack of turning commonplace things into artistic ones which were the wonder and admiration of all his friends. A pair of croquet mallets was transformed into high candlesticks, a row of cracked plates made decorations for the shelf above the door, a wash bench covered by a rug and set off with a row of pillows looked well on one side the room, pussywillows and strange weeds in old stone jars were most effective against a background of plain building paper, and so it went. All this appealed so strongly to the little girls that they were in danger of neglecting their studies in order to rush out to the studio, and at last a rule was made that they could go only once a day and then when their lessons for the next day were learned.

One Saturday, however, Elizabeth overstepped the bounds. She really didn't mean to, in the first place, but circumstances so overcame her scruples that she forgot.

After having made sketches of the three girls separately and collectively, Mr. Kemp decided that he must have Elizabeth to sit for the figure in a picture he was painting. She did not particularly enjoy being a model, for it was very wearisome work to an active little body who found it very difficult to keep perfectly still for even two minutes; when it came to twenty or more on a stretch it was next to impossible. Yet for the sake of an excuse to go to the studio she was willing to undergo the martyrdom.

On this special Saturday she hurried off very soon after breakfast with the intention of studying her lessons in the afternoon. She had begged her mother to allow her to break the rule just this once, "Because," she said, "Mr. Kemp says the light is much better in the morning, and besides he is in a hurry to get this particular picture done, for he may have a chance to sell it."

"Very well," replied her mother, "for this once

you may set aside the rule, but come back at noon, Elizabeth."

The child did not wait for the last words but was off like a shot. It was a cool, cloudy morning, robins and bluebirds carolling from the tree-tops, and in the fields green grass pushing through the moist earth. "Pretty soon there will be violets," said Elizabeth to herself. She stopped to gather some yellow daffodils from the flower border and bore them with her, singing as she went along, "Daffy-down-dilly came up in the cold." When she reached the door of the studio she paused to lift the knocker and to pound it hard against the piece of metal beneath it. The knocker was one of Mr. Kemp's latest contrivances and was made of a large curtain ring fastened to an old piece of heavy tin. It took some pounding to bring forth much sound, but no one failed to use this means of letting the artist know of the arrival of a visitor.

At the summons Mr. Kemp came to the door with a dish towel and a tea cup in his hand. "Why, how nice and early you are," he said. "I am just washing up my breakfast things."

Elizabeth laughed. It seemed funny to hear a man

say that, although she knew Mr. Kemp prepared his own breakfast and supper.

“Eggs, coffee and toast,” Mr. Kemp went on. “Good enough for a king. By the way, Elfie, we tried the new chimney last night and it works like a breeze. We can have a fire in the fireplace today if you are cold.” Having completed the rest, Mr. Kemp and the boys were ambitious to try their powers further and had built a stone chimney on the outside of the small building, thereby adding much to its appearance, both inside and out.

“Did you cook your breakfast over a fire on the hearth?” asked Elizabeth.

“No, I was too lazy to make it, so I used the oil stove. One can really toast quite well over it. I’ll be ready as soon as I put this cup away.” He went back into the pantry while Elizabeth busied herself in placing the daffodils in a ginger jar.

“Fine,” exclaimed Mr. Kemp when he came back. “It brings sunlight right into the room, doesn’t it?”

“I always think of daffys as cups of sunshine,” returned Elizabeth.

“I might have known you would; it sounds just like you,” responded the artist as he busied himself

with setting his palette. "I think I must paint a picture of you and the daffys in a strong sunlight. It could be made something stunning."

Elizabeth sighed. She really hoped that when this picture was done Mr. Kemp would think he had had enough of a little girl with Titian hair, but it was evident that he would keep on indefinitely and, like many another, he didn't seem in the least to realize that it might be a hardship, so intent was he upon making the studies. Most of the girls, the older as well as the younger, thought it an immense compliment to be asked to sit to the painter, but Elizabeth had come to learn that it was not always so. Some combination of light and shade, some special effect, was what was considered, rather than a question of beauty. Why, had she not seen Mr. Kemp painting very ugly old women and uglier old men?

The morning passed slowly, although it must be said that Mr. Kemp was good company and did his best to entertain his little sitter. About eleven o'clock the threatening clouds dissolved into rain, which came down harder and harder.

"It's coming down with a vengeance, isn't it?"

said Mr. Kemp, stepping back from his easel and looking at his work contemplatively. Then he put down his palette and went to the window to look out. "I say, Elfie," he said, "let's have dinner here. I'm not going to risk my sweet self out in this rain. I'll build up a good fire and we will cook some potatoes in the ashes. Let me see what is in the larder. Come on."

Elizabeth jumped down, only too glad of the diversion. "It is too early, isn't it?" she asked.

"Oh dear, no, not to roast potatoes. It takes ages to cook them. I'll make the fire first thing." He was not long in finding dry shavings and wood and soon had a fire burning cheerily on the hearth. "Now come, let's forage," he said. "Eggs; we've plenty of those. I will make an omelette; I learned how to do that in Paris. Here is some chipped beef and a can of sardines. Which do you like best?"

"Oh, sardines,"—Elizabeth declared for these.

"I might make a sardine omelette; that wouldn't be bad, and we can open a can of soup to have first. Do you like orange marmalade? I know there is a lot of that; bread and butter. Milk? There should be milk. Oh yes, here it is. I don't believe there is

much else, except crackers and cheese. Will that be enough?"

"It will be loads," Elizabeth assured him in a pleased voice. This was a great variety and the novelty of it all was so delightful. The potatoes were put in the hot embers as soon as there were any for them and then there was a merry time over setting the table. Dishes of various sizes, shapes and patterns were gathered together, paper napkins were laid, the jar of daffodils set in the middle of the rather rickety table and they stood off to admire the effect.

"I call that a very stylish set-out," declared Mr. Kemp. "Take this fork, Elfie, and prod those potatoes while I get to work with the other things. Where in the world did I put that can-opener? See if you can find it, Elfie, while I do something else."

Elizabeth hunted around and at last found the can-opener had been used to prop open one of the windows. "What a negligible little child you are, Mr. Titian," she said, bringing it to him. They met on common ground when it came to frolics like this.

"So I am, Elfie. I remember now, that I couldn't find a stick for that foolish window. I am going to

put some catches on after awhile, but Rome wasn't built in a day. What about those potatoes?"

"They are pretty hard yet."

"They are? Mean things; and I am getting hungrier every minute. We might forego the potatoes and eat them later. What do you say? I don't believe we can wait for the slow things. Bully! Here is a can of peas, just the things to go with the omelette. Have you any idea what you do with them, Elfie? Do they have to be cooked or anything?"

"I have seen 'Lectra pour cold water over them," replied Elizabeth doubtfully. "She puts them in a colander and does that, I know; I don't remember whether she cooks them or not."

Mr. Kemp carefully pierced a pea with a fork. "They appear quite soft," he announced. "I think if we just warm them up it will do. Dear me, I haven't a colander. I will just wash them in a pan and scoop them up with a spoon; I reckon that will do."

"I could do that," Elizabeth offered.

"So you can. I think they will get hot while I am making the omelette. But perhaps we'd better eat the soup first because it will not do to let the ome-

lette stand, besides there will not be room enough on the stove for more than two things."

They decided to do this and when the soup was hot they carried it in, one eating from a soup plate and the other from a bowl, and making very merry over it.

"I smell something burning," cried Elizabeth, as she was taking her last spoonful of soup.

"The peas!" cried Mr. Kemp. "I didn't put any water on them and probably they are stuck fast." He rushed out to the little cubby which he called the kitchenette and, sure enough, the peas had stuck fast. "I don't suppose they are any good," said Mr. Kemp, looking at them ruefully. "They are burnt black at the bottom."

"Perhaps they won't be so bad on top, if you take them off carefully."

Mr. Kemp followed her suggestion, but after gingerly removing the top layer and tasting it, he declared that the taste went all the way through. "So we'll have to give them up as a bad job," he declared. "Well, at least we shall have the omelette. I will make it big enough to make up for the peas, only I had set my heart on those peas. I thought

how lovely it would be to make a rim of them around the omelette, quite Frenchy, and the yellow and green would have matched the daffodils so nicely."

"Oh, never mind, we shall do very well. I don't mind if you don't."

While Mr. Kemp was preparing the omelette, Elizabeth thought she might try the potatoes again, and this time she found that they were really done. She rushed to the kitchenette to announce her discovery. "They are done!" she exclaimed.

"What? Who?" cried Mr. Kemp. "Why do you come upon me in that sudden way, Elfie? I nearly dropped the pan—and then there would be trouble in the camp."

"The potatoes," answered Elizabeth. "I tried them, and I am quite sure they are done, so now we shall not mind about the peas."

"I had forgotten the blessed things entirely. Fetch them along, Elfie, but don't burn yourself. I have a ticklish job here in getting this precious omelette dished. My heart is in my mouth. Don't watch me, there's a good child. If I should drop it I should be ready to weep."

Elizabeth laughed and went off to take up the

potatoes with a long fork. They were rather black on the outside but when opened showed themselves white and mealy within. Then they fell to enjoying their feast to the fullest. Elizabeth thought she had never tasted a better dinner and praised her friend's skill as a cook. When it was disposed of and the dishes washed, they suddenly discovered that it was quite late and that they had been hours over the preparation, the eating and the clearing up. To be sure there had been much joking and laughing, some dilly-dallying, and all that.

"Dear me," cried Elizabeth, "I had no idea how late it was. I must go."

"Oh, but it is raining so hard. You'd better wait a few minutes," Mr. Kemp dissuaded her.

It was raining very hard, and Elizabeth waited. Mr. Kemp began telling her a fascinating tale and, what with his interest in the telling and hers in the listening, the moments passed unheeded until it was finished. Then Elizabeth sprang to her feet. "It is dark," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Titian, I should have gone long ago."

"I will see you home, never fear," he said. "We've had a great day, Elfie, haven't we?"

"Oh yes, we have," she could truthfully say, but her conscience smote her when she remembered that she was only to spend the morning. She wondered what excuse she could give. It had rained, to be sure, but not steadily, and she could easily have taken the walk, rain or no rain; but she did not voice her thoughts to Mr. Kemp, but cheerfully trotted along with him under an umbrella, and he left her at her own door with a merry word of farewell.

Elizabeth paused for a moment in the hall after she entered the house. She heard voices upstairs. There was a light in the sitting-room, but no one was there. She took off her things, hung them up, and gathered up her school books, taking them to the sitting-room, by the table of which she sat down.

Presently she heard a voice from the doorway saying: "Elizabeth, where have you been all day?"

She did not look up, but answered: "At the studio, mother."

"All day? Where did you have your dinner?"

"We had it there, such a lovely, tasteful dinner. Mr. Kemp and I got it ourselves." Elizabeth tried to be very animated and to speak as if it were a matter of course. Her mother made no comment,

and she went on. "You see it was raining so hard ——"

"Not all day."

"Well, it was whenever I looked out, and Mr. Kemp invited me. He wanted to try the new chimney and roast potatoes. It was such a big, populous fire at first and the sparks flew out so we had to wait till it stopped popping and there were some red embers to put the potatoes in. They were a long, long time roasting, though."

"And after dinner?"

"We washed the dishes and then I was coming, but it was raining so awfully hard just then so we sat down by the fire and Mr. Kemp told me a lovely narration. I was so interested in it that I didn't know how late it was getting, and when he had finished I came straight home. He came with me. You weren't worried, were you, mother?"

"I was not so much worried as I was grieved to know that you wilfully disobeyed me. I excused you from the usual rule of getting your lessons in the morning and you promised to study this afternoon, yet you have just come in and it is supper-time."

Elizabeth was silent. She knew she had done wrong, but it was so hard to leave off when one was having such an unusually good time. "I didn't mean to stay so late," she made the excuse lamely.

"I think, my dear," said her mother, "that in order to prevent your forgetting another time, I must forbid your going at all to the studio until I give you permission." Then her mother walked away, and Elizabeth drew a long sigh as she turned back to her books.

CHAPTER XV

ELIZABETH WEARS BLUE

IF Betsy had not gone to the city with her aunt Emily on that rainy Saturday it is doubtful if Elizabeth had been willing to spend so long a time at the studio. As it was, Betsy had an account of the day's delights, and agreed with her first best that the game was scarcely worth the candle as it deprived her of future visits.

"I suppose your mother didn't say how long it would be before you could go again," said Betsy gravely.

"No; that's just it," replied Elizabeth. "I shall be on the tattered edge of despair for who knows how long. Perhaps if I am very, very good she will lift the dread decree sooner than if I were very, very bad. Well," Elizabeth sighed, "I suppose that those who dance must pay the piper. It will always be a luminous day in the almanac of my thoughts. Now tell me, Betsy, what sort of day did you have?"

"Oh, the usual kind. We shopped all the morning and went to the same place for lunch that we always go, then aunt Emily called on old Miss Peters, and we took the five o'clock train; that's all."

"Did you get the new hat?"

"Yes, and the stuff for two new frocks. Miss Cutter comes next week, you know. One of the frocks is very pretty, I think; a challis with weentsy blue flowers sprinkled over it. I am going to wear blue ribbons with it."

"I love blue and I can never, never wear it, Betsy," said Elizabeth, shaking her head mournfully.

"Oh well, I wouldn't care. Maybe your children can, or at least some of them, and that will do just as well."

"That is a very comforting thought," returned Elizabeth, "and you may be very sure, Betsy, that I will treat with spurn any man with red hair who comes to woo me."

"Even if he should be a prince?" asked Betsy.

"Even if he were a king," Elizabeth assured her. "What is your hat like, Betsy? Are you going to wear it Sunday?"

"Aunt Emily says I must keep it for Easter. It is quite nice, yes; but nothing very grand. Shall you get a new hat, Elizabeth?"

"I suppose not. We have to be very economical this year on account of Dick's going to college. Mother and Kathie were looking over things yesterday, and they thought my hat would do. Kathie is going to retrim it with some ribbons she has. I don't care so very much for I seldom wear it except to church and Sunday-school. I must try not to take an interest in such carnial things if I am to be very, very good."

Betsy laughed. "You are so funny, Elizabeth. I don't think it is wicked to like nice things."

"No, I suppose it isn't if you don't follow after them to the seclusion of anything else." Elizabeth had heard her mother say something like this, although she did not use the word seclusion. "Do you know what I think I shall do so as to prove my sincereness to mother; I think I shall mortify myself for a week or more and wear only the most unbecoming and unappropriate things. Why,"—she sat up suddenly in pleased excitement,—"I might even wear pink or blue."

"Oh, I wouldn't," Betsy tried to dissuade her.
"I don't think it would look a bit nice."

"That is just my object. I shall be mortifying the flesh dreadfully; and besides," she added, "it would give me a chance for once in my life to see how I really did look in those colors."

"But you haven't anything blue or pink," Betsy reminded her.

"I have some old blue ribbons that Kathie gave me for my dolls, and I might dye something. If I made a very, very strong blueing with laundry blue I could dip an old white waist in it and it might do." Elizabeth, once launched upon such an enterprise, was eager to carry it to the fullest lengths.

"What would Mr. Kemp say?" Betsy asked.
"He would think you had very poor taste and were very inartistic."

"That would be part of the punishment, you see. It would be all the better, for it was on his account that I erred and strayed from my ways. Yes, I think it is exactly what I must do. You don't mind, Betsy, if I go now and prepare my penitential robes?" They were sitting under their big trysting tree back of the Tysons' garden when this talk took place.

"Perhaps you would like to come with me and help dye the waist," Elizabeth proposed, seeing that Betsy looked dubious.

"Oh yes; that would be better," agreed Betsy. "Shall you wear blue to school tomorrow, Elizabeth? What will Miss Jewett think?"

"She may not approve, but I shall be disobeying no rules," returned Elizabeth steadfastly. "I suppose Corinne Barker will turn up her nose and will make unkind remarks, but I must suffer in silence."

Betsy giggled. She was well aware that all this was play more than actual humility on the part of Elizabeth, but it was amusing and she wanted to see how it would turn out. She did not know of another girl who would be so daring in the face of established precedents.

"I will ask 'Lectra to press out the ribbons for me," said Elizabeth, as they trotted along home, "and I shall have to ask her for the blue. I hope she is in a good humor."

They found Electra disposed to grant any favor. The irons were on so it was no trouble to press out the ribbons. As for the waist, Elizabeth and Betsy preferred to try their experiments on that where

they would be unobserved. They chose the attic for their work, and, having prepared a basinful of water, deeply, darkly blue, they dipped the waist in several times and then hung it up to dry.

"It is lucky that it is that crêpe stuff that doesn't need ironing," remarked Elizabeth as she carefully examined her work. "It is a waist that was Kathie's, you know. I hope it won't be very streaky. I wish I had a blue skirt to go with it, but as I haven't I shall have to wear brown."

"They won't look very pretty together," said Betsy doubtfully.

"Am I doing this to look pretty?" inquired Elizabeth with disdain. "Look at my hands, Betsy. Do you suppose the blue will come off?"

"You will have to scrub them pretty hard," Betsy advised her.

But hard as she scrubbed there was a tinge of blue remaining although Betsy comforted her by saying it would wear off. "Do you suppose your mother will consent to your wearing blue — now you have gone to all this trouble about it?" Betsy brought up this difficulty.

"Dear me, I don't know. Well, all is, I shall make

the experiment and take the risks." By this time Elizabeth had worked herself up into a state of ardent desire to wear blue. It was the unusual which appealed to her. It would make a small sensation and she wouldn't tell anyone why she did it, she said to herself. "All I shall say when they ask me, if anyone does," she said to Betsy, "is: It is a vow."

Fortunately for her plan, she was the first down in the morning, and only her father appeared before she finished breakfast. As he was not so very observant, he did not notice the blue bows on her hair. They were not well tied, but Betsy had promised to give the finishing touch, and Elizabeth sped away without a farewell to any but her father, saying that she had promised to stop at Betsy's very early. Betsy was as good as her word and attended to the bows, commenting upon Elizabeth's appearance as she did so. "The blue isn't bad in one way," she said, "for it makes your cheeks look pinker and your skin whiter, but — don't get mad, Elizabeth, — it also makes your hair look redder."

"Oh, I suppose so," returned Elizabeth resignedly. "I expected that, and indeed I noticed it myself. Is the waist very streaky, Betsy?"

"Why, no, not so very. It isn't a very pretty color, but it is real blue."

"Then my purpose is accomplished," declared Elizabeth.

There were many curious glances cast in her direction that morning. Corinne and Bess giggled as Elizabeth knew they would and she was quite sure that she could tell exactly what they whispered one to another, but she bore herself gravely and did not look the least conscious. Even Miss Jewett smiled when she saw the prancing blue bows adorning the ruddy locks, but Elizabeth made no sign of seeing the smile. To all questions from the more daringly curious she answered solemnly: "It is a vow," and nothing further would she say.

She felt very triumphant at having been able to carry out her intention to the letter, although in her inmost heart she perfectly well knew that the blue bows would be ordered off instantly as soon as she reached home. She did not flinch, however, from the ordeal, but walked in to dinner with all the composure of one well assured of her position.

"Will you look at Elizabeth?" cried Kathie as soon as she caught sight of her costume. "You

don't mean to say that you have been to school in that rig."

"I certainly do," returned Elizabeth calmly.

"Well, I should think you would be ashamed to be seen in it. Mother," she called, "do come here and see this child. I declare, I don't know what she will do next. Where did you get that hideous waist? I don't recognize it."

"You should, for it used to be yours," returned Elizabeth.

"Mine? I never possessed a queer fadey blue thing like that. Of all combinations—with those sky-blue hair-ribbons. I don't see what induced you to put them together."

"It was the best I could do," Elizabeth told her. "I had nothing blue and so I dyed the waist, and the ribbons were on a hat of yours that you got wet. You gave them to me for my dolls and 'Lectra pressed them out for me."

Kathie gazed at her with an expression of helpless despair. "Mother," she said, as Mrs. Hollins entered the room, "do look at this child. Can you believe she went to school dressed that way?"

"Why did you do so, Elizabeth?" asked her mother quietly.

"I did it to mortify the flesh," returned Elizabeth defiantly, but speaking to Kathie. "I think you are very wrong to discourage me from keeping a vow and trying to be good. I can't take pilgrimages and do things like that, and you go to work and cast wet blankets upon my holy purposes."

Kathie had to laugh at the very injured expression. "I don't see the point yet," she said, "but I do see that you are the most absurd child that was ever created. Have you an idea of what drove her to this absurdity, mother?"

"I think I have, perhaps. She will tell me, I am sure. Go on and eat your dinner, Elizabeth, and we will see about this afterward."

Elizabeth continued her meal with an air of virtuous indignation which made her mother smile each time she looked at her. As she had done nothing absolutely wrong she did not deserve so much as a scolding, though her mother did wish she could get behind the appearance and find the real motive. She put her arm around the child when they rose from the table. "Suppose we go up and change those ribbons and that waist for something more becoming," she whispered.

Elizabeth obediently followed, feeling reassured and not at all disturbed.

"Mother would very much like to know what was passing in that funny little mind of yours when you put on these," said Mrs. Hollins, as she unfastened the startling bows. "You must have had some motive, I am sure. Won't you tell mother what it was?"

"Well," said Elizabeth, "it began when I was trying to think of something I could do to show you that I wanted to be very, very good, so you would uplift the ban that wouldn't allow me to go to the studio. I tried to think of some holy mortification, and I couldn't think of anything but to wear blue, which you and Kathie have always told me would make me look like a fright. I had these ribbons, but I didn't have any waist but this old one, and I thought if I blued it very, very much it would do."

"Didn't the girls think you looked rather queer?" asked her mother.

"Oh yes; I expected that; it was part of the holy mortification."

"Well, dear, if you thought it was such a righteous thing to do, and one that deserved approval, why

did you hurry off to school this morning before I could see you?"

This was rather a staggering question, and Elizabeth was silent, not knowing exactly how to answer it.

"If you did what you thought was a pious act because you wanted my approval, I can't see why you didn't parade yourself before me the first thing in the morning, so I could get the whole benefit of it," continued Mrs. Hollins. "'Fess up, Elizabeth. That was not the true motive. You wanted to see how you would look in blue."

"Well, yes; I suppose that was it," answered Elizabeth, a little shamefacedly. "But, mother, it really wasn't in the beginning; only the more I thought about it the more I wanted to do it. I have always been crazy about blue and I thought there is the one chance of my life, so I took it."

"And are you quite satisfied?" asked her mother.

Elizabeth stroked lovingly the blue ribbons which her mother had taken off. "I don't know," she replied. "I do wish I could wear them again some day. Betsy says they are becoming to my complexion, but not to my hair."

"I think she is right."

"When I grow up," said Elizabeth, "I think I will go off somewhere for a whole year, somewhere that I am a perfect stranger to everyone, and I will dye my hair and wear blue for a whole year."

Mrs. Hollins laughed. "Well, honey, that would be an idea, but now you'd better run along. You look much more like my own little girl as you are."

However, Elizabeth did not have to grow up before she wore blue again, for when she reached home that afternoon there was Mr. Kemp with a delightful scheme to unfold. "My trunk full of costumes has come," he announced, "and I want you to come and help me unpack."

Elizabeth looked at her mother. "You may go for a little while," Mrs. Hollins gave permission, "but you must be sure that she comes home before dark, Mr. Kemp. She stayed much too long the last time."

"I give you my word that I will bring her back before dark," Mr. Kemp promised, and the child went off, after giving her mother a rapturous hug and kiss.

These costumes had been much talked over by

Mr. Kemp and Elizabeth. They appealed to her very strongly, for he had promised that she should dress up in some of them. To wear a train, a peasant's dress, a Watteau costume and others quite as picturesque, was something the child had been looking forward to for some time. The dressing up was not for that day, however, for there was only time for a short survey. In the midst of this Mr. Kemp exclaimed: "I'll tell you what we will do, Elfie; we'll give some tableaux. This place is quite big enough, and we'll have a lot of the crowd here. We can make pictures, you know; set a big frame over there and pose the figures behind it. That will be a fine way to show off my costumes and be good fun, too."

"And may I be in them?" asked Elizabeth eagerly.

"Well, rather," replied Mr. Kemp.

"And could I wear this?" Elizabeth held up a blond wig, "and a blue dress?"

Mr. Kemp laughed. Kathie had just been telling him of Elizabeth's "holy mortification," to his great entertainment. "Blue it shall be," he declared. "I will rig you up as a Dresden shepherdess, if I can get hold of a proper hat, and you shall be some other

lovely female, a portrait, maybe, by Reynolds or Gainsborough. Oh, we'll fix you out all right, but if I let you wear the wig you must make a bargain that I have my way in making a Titian of you. I'll tell you what, Elfie, I will be Titian painting and you shall be the picture itself."

They had a good laugh over this and, as it turned out, the tableau was nearly spoiled because Elizabeth could not keep her face straight with a paint brush so very near the corner of her mouth, and Mr. Titian looking at her so fixedly with such a quizzical expression.

Everyone pronounced the pictures a great success, but Elizabeth's crowning joy was when she actually wore Miss Jewett's hat trimmed with corn-flowers and donned a blue dress to match it; yet, strange to say, everyone declared that she was much more lovely in the Titian picture, although it would be some years before she would grow into an appreciation of this herself. After this she wore the blond wig and the trailing blue frock many times, but never with such perfect satisfaction as that first time.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GRAY HOUSE OPENS

THE tableaux were given on Easter Monday and a few days later Elizabeth was told that her cousins were coming back to the gray house. She hurried off to tell Betsy, who once was jealous of Ruth but was now her very good friend. "I wonder who Ruth will have for her first best," remarked Betsy. "She used to have Bess, you know, but since Bess has become so thick with Corinne perhaps she won't."

"Bess doesn't go with Corinne near so much as she did," Elizabeth assured her, "besides, Corinne will be going back home soon."

"And I hope she'll stay there," returned Betsy fervently.

"Well, anyhow," said Elizabeth, "we will not let Ruth think we don't want her with us, will we, Betsy?"

"Of course not. I am very fond of Ruth and we

three can play together whether Bess joins us or not. I wish we could do something as a sort of welcome for Ruth. Can't you think of something, Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth proposed several plans, but all were too elaborate or impossible. "I will tell you what we can do," she said at last. "We can dress up like old beggar women. We will bend over and take sticks to walk with, and baskets. We will sneak around the back way and when we hear Ruth coming we will ask for food in a whining voice and suddenly we will throw off the disguise and appear in our true characters."

"Oh, I think that will be fine," cried Betsy, well pleased with the idea. "It will be such a surprise. What can we wear as a disguise, Elizabeth?"

"We ought to have rags, I suppose, but maybe we can root out some old skirts or petticoats. One of us could wear a shawl over her head and the other could find something like a big handkerchief. We must bring them 'way over our faces so we cannot be recognized." They were quite enraptured with their plan, Elizabeth promising to let Betsy know just as soon as the Gilmore family had returned, and

the two parted, arranging to meet at a certain chosen spot.

The next day, when Elizabeth came home at noon she heard that her cousins would arrive about two o'clock, but her mother did not think it worth while for her to stay at home to see them. "You can go right up after school this afternoon," she said, and Elizabeth was satisfied, the more so that Betsy would be free to help her carry out her plan of surprising Ruth.

Each girl had taken her bundle of poverty-stricken clothes and had carried it to the hollow trysting-tree. This being in a most secluded spot, they were not observed when they changed their appearance and assumed the characters of old women.

"You look so funny," giggled Betsy when Elizabeth, in a much stained and faded skirt of Electra's, an old worsted shawl, and a battered felt hat tied down over her ears, announced that she was ready and how did she look.

Betsy was more respectable in a cast-off skirt of Elizabeth's, a black shawl over her head, and a basket on her arm. Being shorter than her comrade, the skirt reached to her ankles, but instead of her

own neat shoes she displayed an old pair of Kathie's which Elizabeth had found in the attic. The skirt which Elizabeth wore was sufficiently long to cover her feet, but she had chosen her oldest shoes to wear.

Taking a circuitous route, the two stole around the back way and approached the rear of the house where they could take a survey, hiding behind the grape arbor and peeping out from time to time.

"I see cousin Belle on the front porch," Elizabeth at last whispered, after making a tour of investigation. "Grandpa Gil is there, too, and Cousin Tom went down toward the studio. There comes Ruth now, Betsy. She is probably going down to the spring. Hide, hide, Betsy, and when we hear footsteps we will walk out and confront her. It will have to be she for there is no one else, for I can see both maids in the kitchen and Martin is down at the garage." All this in hurried whispers.

The two would-be beggars sprang back behind the grape arbor which ran along the side of the hill and opened upon the path which led to the spring. They waited, and presently heard footsteps enter the grape arbor. They did not dare to look, but cowered behind a low evergreen bush which stood at the end of the

arbor. The footsteps came nearer and nearer. "She is walking rather slowly," whispered Elizabeth, "but I think we may appear now." She stepped out from her hiding-place, Betsy following. With heads bent and faces well obscured they began to whine: "Please help two poor unfortunates."

"Go away with you," a peremptory voice said, not Ruth's, by any means. "What are you doing here? Don't you know you are trespassing upon private property?"

The two little girls gave one scared look and beheld the tall form of a perfectly strange elderly lady, whom neither had ever seen before. Betsy stepped back hastily; Elizabeth followed suit. She stumbled against Betsy. They both lost footing on the slippery side of the hill and went rolling over and over down the incline. The lady at the top of the hill looked after them, not able to restrain a laugh. It was so comical to see two such queer-looking creatures tumbling over one another and looking like some absurd moving picture. But in a moment the observer began to be alarmed lest the two were injured by their fall, and she called out to them: "Are you hurt?"

To her amazement a childish voice answered: "Oh no; we're not a bit hurt; only shaken up a little," and a childish face peeped up at her from a mass of copper-colored hair.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the lady. She stood still for a moment and then walked quickly toward the house.

Having reached the foot of the hill the two girls gathered themselves together and sat up. Elizabeth's hat hung on the back of her head, her worsted shawl had been dragged off by the weeds, while Betsy's shawl trailed along the ground behind her.

"Well," exclaimed Betsy, "that was a surprise, sure enough."

"And we gave it to ourselves," returned Elizabeth; then the humor of the situation overcame them and they rocked with mirthful laughter.

When the first fit of merriment was over Elizabeth, rubbing her knees, asked, "Are you hurt at all, Betsy?"

"I don't think so, for my shawl saved me," replied Betsy, after feeling various parts of her body; "It rolled me up like a mummy at first, then it

caught in some briars and unrolled just before we stopped."

"My knees and elbows got pretty well bumped," Elizabeth continued to rub them, "but otherwise I am quite sound. Who in the world do you suppose that was, Betsy? I never was so astonished in my life as when I heard that voice." Then they both went off again into peals of laughter.

When they had sobered down they consulted as to what should next be done. "We can't sit here all day," said Elizabeth, "and we haven't seen Ruth at all. I think we'd better take off our disguise, roll the things up and hide them in that fence corner, and then go around by the front way and say nothing about this till we have to. Of course, we will explain as soon as we get a good chance, but at first we needn't."

"I think that will be best," agreed Betsy. "It is lucky I put on the old shoes over my own, or I shouldn't be in a state to see anyone."

"My shoes look pretty bad," said Elizabeth, contemplating the worn toes, "but I shall have to make them do, for I don't want to go all the way home."

"Oh, they'll do." Betsy viewed them. "They

aren't any worse than the last time you wore them, you know."

"And I did wear them to school that last time," Elizabeth remembered. "Well, come on, let us go over and invest ourselves of these incumbrances, and then we will go and see Ruth."

They ran along to the fence corner, made a bundle of the superfluous clothes, and then proceeded decorously along the road which led to the gray house. They found the family sitting on the porch, waiting for their trunks to arrive. The maids were busy inside setting things to rights, but there was no sign of the lady whom they had encountered a short time before. Ruth ran out joyously to meet them. "I have been watching for you," she said, "for I knew you would come soon." Then followed many embraces and inquiries after the health of one and another; then Mrs. Gilmore, Grandpa Gil, and cousin Tom must be greeted. Still no sign of the strange lady.

"Ruth will come to school with us for the rest of the year, won't she, Cousin Belle," Elizabeth had just asked when a voice from the doorway interrupted the answer.

"That's one of them; I'd know that red head anywhere. Those are the children who scared me nearly out of my wits. With my weak heart it is a wonder I didn't collapse on the spot. Who are the little wretches, Isabel?"

Everyone was speechless as the lady stepped out on the porch. Then cousin Belle found voice to say: "These? Why this," — she laid her hand on Elizabeth's arm, — "this is Kate Hollins's little girl Elizabeth, and the other one is our little friend Betsy Tyson. Come out, aunt Eunice, won't you?"

The lady glared first at Elizabeth and then at Betsy. "They are the identical children, I tell you," she said, stepping out upon the porch. "What did they mean by trying to scare me, — a person of my years? I hate practical jokes and practical jokers."

"We didn't mean —" began Elizabeth timidly, "we didn't want to scare anyone —"

"Then why did you do it?" snapped out the irate lady.

Elizabeth looked helplessly at Betsy, who hung her head and appeared very much crestfallen.

Grandpa Gil stretched out a kindly hand to Elizabeth. "Come here, my dear," he said, "and tell

us how it all happened. I can't quite make out what the trouble is."

Elizabeth went over to her old friend, who put his arm around her and drew her close. "Miss Darby was alarmed at somebody or something in the garden — — —"

"Indeed, I was," interrupted Miss Darby, who sat rigidly near by. "It came near bringing on an attack. I had to go in and take some drops. Fortunately I never travel without them."

"We had no idea it was anyone we didn't know," began Elizabeth. "We thought it was Ruth."

"A pretty tale," sniffed Miss Darby. "Much I look like Ruth."

"We didn't see who it was, for we covered our faces," — Elizabeth turned to Mr. Gilmore with the explanation. "We were hiding behind the evergreen bush and when we heard footsteps we thought they were Ruth's."

"Humph!" Miss Darby gave a scornful exclamation.

Grandpa Gil looked puzzled. "Still I don't understand just what happened," he said. "Suppose you begin at the beginning, my dear."

“Well,” — Elizabeth felt emboldened to tell the whole story, — “we wanted to do something to welcome Ruth, and we couldn’t think of anything really nice, but we thought it would be funny if we dressed up like two old beggar women and lay in wait for her, then when we had whined out our beseechment we would suddenly throw off our disguise and stand before her in our true characters.”

“And when we saw a perfect stranger,” put in Betsy, “we were the ones who were surprised and scared. We were so taken aback that we rolled all the way down hill.”

“But we weren’t hurt,” Elizabeth took care to assure them all. “I bruised and scraped my elbows and knees a little, but that was all.”

“Quite what you might expect in playing a practical joke,” remarked Miss Darby. “I hate practical jokes,” she repeated.

“I cannot see that they really intended any harm,” said Mr. Gilmore mildly.

“Whether they intended it or not they did enough,” returned Miss Darby, still refusing to be mollified. “I never knew a red-headed person yet that wasn’t mischievous and unruly. Where did

she get that red hair, anyhow? I am sure there is none in our family. It must come from her father's side of the house."

Elizabeth cast a deprecating look at her cousin Belle, who put in a good word. "We all admire Elizabeth's hair very much, aunt Eunice, and we are very fond of her."

Aunt Eunice looked at Elizabeth as much as to say that she was far from agreeing with this remark, and to Elizabeth's indignation said: "I am sorry Kate hasn't shown better judgment in bringing up her children. I imagined that she was a good and careful mother."

This was too much for Elizabeth. She was quick-tempered when suddenly aroused, and now she did not hesitate to speak her mind. "You can say what you please about me," she said, turning to Miss Darby, "whether it is true or not; but I will thank you to know that my mother is the best in the world, and I am not going to listen to a word against her from you or anybody else." Then, bursting into a passion of tears, she broke away from Grandpa Gil and rushed off, leaving Betsy to follow.

"My, what a little spitfire," exclaimed Miss

Darby. "I certainly don't want to have the bringing up of that child. I haven't a doubt but poor Kate has her hands full."

"You certainly have rubbed her the wrong way, aunt Eunice," declared Mrs. Gilmore. "She is one of the dearest and sweetest children in the world, as a general thing. She is full of fancies and whims, but she is as straightforward and conscientious as even you could wish. I don't know of another whom I prefer for a companion to Ruth."

"You must be greatly prejudiced," insisted Miss Darby. "I certainly hope she will keep out of my sight while I am here."

Betsy, more self-controlled than Elizabeth, bit her lip to keep from speaking her mind also. Her heart swelled within her at such criticism of her dear Elizabeth. She could scarcely keep back the tears as she said: "Mrs. Gilmore, I think I must go. Good-bye, Ruth. Be sure to come to see me very soon." Then, with a dignified little bow, she turned away, determining to seek out the abused Elizabeth and pour the balm of consolation upon her bruised heart.

She found her friend in the arms of her mother,

sobbing out the tale of her woes. Betsy joined in giving the indignant recital all its value.

“Dear, dear,” murmured Mrs. Hollins; “this is most unfortunate. I am afraid you have gained aunt Eunice’s ill-will. She is very strong in her prejudices and opinions, although a very good woman.”

“Is she your aunt, too, Mrs. Hollins?” asked Betsy.

“Yes, she is my father’s sister, although I have seen but little of her. She was spending the winter in Florida at the same time that cousin Belle was and was persuaded to come up and make a visit before going to her home in western New York.”

“I wish she hadn’t been persuaded,” sighed Elizabeth.

“Under the circumstances I do, too. She is a really kind and charitable woman, doing much good in charity work, but once convinced that her way of thinking is right it is almost impossible to alter her opinion.”

“Well, I shall certainly keep out of her way when she comes here,” said Elizabeth.

“You can come to our house,” Betsy spoke. “You know we are always glad to have you. Uncle Rob

is devoted to you, and aunt Emily likes you, too; I know she does."

This was comforting to hear, for to be actually disliked by anyone was a novel experience for Elizabeth. With the exception of Corinne Barker, she did not know of another who felt toward her as did this hitherto unknown aunt. "I am awfully sorry your aunt doesn't like me, mother," she said.

"She is your aunt, too, dear, your great-aunt. I am sorry, myself, for I should like her to be fond of myself and my children."

"Do you think she should have talked in that horrid way, and did we do anything so very bad?"

"No, I cannot say that you did. It is merely unfortunate that she happened to come along just when she did."

"I couldn't stand her saying such mean, mean things about you," Elizabeth went on. "I don't care who she is, I despise her for it. Wasn't I right to stand up for my ownest mother?" Elizabeth gave her mother a close embrace.

"You were right to stand up for your mother, yes; but I think maybe you could have done so in a less offensive manner. I don't suppose one should ex-

pect little girls to be so very dignified under such circumstances, but I think if you had said less it would have been wiser." It is hard to chide a daughter for the defence of her mother, and Mrs. Hollins wanted to be just and at the same time kind. "Don't say that you despise aunt Eunice," she went on. "When you know her better you may like her very much. She was excited and nervous and probably did not realize what she was saying. She is not used to children except in a general way, and their little pranks she takes too seriously, perhaps. She is kindness itself where poor orphaned children are concerned and does great work for the institutions where they are placed, so you can see that she has really a kind heart in spite of her seeming anger."

Elizabeth sighed. It was very hard to adjust matters in this contradictory world, and she went off with Betsy, both of them much disturbed by the outcome of their surprise.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. MCGONIGLE'S BABIES

IN spite of the fact that aunt Eunice took little notice of her when she came to the house or when Elizabeth saw her at her cousins', Elizabeth's resentment waned rather than increased, for Miss Darby was pleased to speak approvingly of Kathie, seemed charmed with Babs, and behaved very generously and affectionately toward their mother. More than once, off in a corner, Elizabeth listened to harrowing tales of orphaned children whom aunt Eunice had befriended and gradually a certain respect for the nervous, irritable woman was fostered. After that first day, she never referred to the practical joke, as she had named it, but she had a way of looking over Elizabeth's head as if she did not see her, and of changing the subject whenever anything was mentioned in which Elizabeth was concerned, so that the child felt herself still disliked. However, there were yet dear Miss Jewett and Mr.

Kemp who cared much for her, and excepting when Kathie dilated upon aunt Eunice's virtues and generosity, Elizabeth thought little about her. She had invited Kathie to visit her the following winter, promising a good time in the city where she had her home, and insisting that her visitor should be at no expense.

"Of course I would love to go," Elizabeth overheard Kathie saying to her mother, "for aunt Eunice says I may join any class I choose at her expense. I could study music, or drawing, or languages, and it would be a great advantage to me."

"It is certainly an opportunity for you, dear, and I think you should take it," her mother replied.

"But there is the school," said Kathie, after a short silence. "I am sure that I can have it if I apply, and then I could pay Elizabeth's way at the Academy; she really should go next year. Miss Jewett will be married in June, and it would be much better that Elizabeth should change her school."

"All that is true," agreed Mrs. Hollins. "Perhaps we can manage, Kathie, although Dick's college expenses keep us pretty short. The dear boy does his best to keep them down, but when all is

said they do mount up. If you go to aunt Eunice you must have a few new things, for I cannot bear to have you go off with only what you have. You didn't get a new suit last winter and must have one this."

"I think, then, that I shall certainly have to give up the visit," said Kathie. "I won't put you and father to any greater expense, that is certain."

"Well," returned Mrs. Hollins, "winter is a long way off, and who knows what may happen before then? If only aunt Eunice had taken a fancy to Elizabeth," she added, after a pause, "I am sure she would take an interest in the child's education."

"Oh well, we won't borrow trouble, for, as you say, winter is a long way off," Kathie responded.

She walked away humming cheerfully. Elizabeth, curled up in her chair, sighed. "The old question again," she said to herself. "I wish I could do something." She realized that it was within aunt Eunice's power to make things a little easier for her mother and that any help she might be inclined to give would not be refused, for cousin Belle and Mrs. Hollins were her nearest of kin, and naturally need have no compunctions about taking gifts. To be sure, the

Gilmores did not have to be considered, for there was Grandpa Gil always ready to do for them, but Mr. Hollins had no such person to lighten his family burdens. He always maintained that he was glad enough that he was under obligations to no one, that they were happier in their moderate circumstances than most wealthier persons, yet — Elizabeth sat busily thinking for some time, then she made a sudden bounce from her chair and hurried off to Betsy.

She found this young person in her garden, for it was high time to think of future flowers. Betsy, on her knees, was planting seeds. "Have you most finished?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes, I have only the rest of this paper to put in. These are all zinnias in this bed. They make such a show and don't require any attention. Have you made a garden yet, Elizabeth?"

"A sort of one, but I have weightier subjects to consider than gardens just now."

Betsy got up, brushed the earth from her hands, and picked up her trowel. "What?" she asked concisely.

But Elizabeth's thoughts had flown ahead of her

remark. "Which would you rather, that aunt Eunice liked you or didn't like you?" she asked.

"Why, I suppose I'd rather she liked me; it isn't pleasant to have people dislike you."

"That is just what I think," returned Elizabeth. "Mother and father think it is horrid to try to please people for just what you can get out of them, but there are circumstances when it seems to me that we ought to overcome repugnance if we can. Aunt Eunice is really a very good woman, you know."

"Yes, that is what aunt Emily says, and Mrs. Lynde; they think she is fine. It is a dreadful pity, Elizabeth, that we were so unlucky that day she came."

"Yes, that was most misfortunate, — I mean unfortunate; 'Lectra says misfortunate, and mother says it isn't correct. Well, Betsy, are you ready to do something to gain the approbation of the honorable Miss Darby? I am."

"What?"

"Well, you know she is much interested in doing charity things, for the poor, poor babies, especially, so I thought if we went down to Mrs. McGonigle's and told her we would take care of the twins this

afternoon, we could display our charitable interests to aunt Eunice, and she might stop just looking over the tops of our heads."

Betsy looked doubtful. "They are such dirty, smelly babies," she said. "They always smell sour and as if their clothes hadn't been washed in ages and ages."

"I know; but I suppose that is generally the way with poor babies whose mothers don't have time to attend to them properly. We could bathe them ourselves, but I suppose it wouldn't do to wash their clothes, for we have nothing we could put on while theirs were drying." Elizabeth would not have hesitated at the undertaking, given the change of clothes.

Betsy, who had taken to heart the fact that her usually popular Elizabeth was scorned by the haughty lady with white hair and majestic mien, was ready to do anything which might establish her friend in aunt Eunice's good graces, so the two set off for Mrs. McGonigle's rickety house. It was not a specially attractive place to the girls, although Bert usually found it so, as for some reason he preferred the society of Patsy McGonigle to that of any

other of his schoolmates. Mrs. McGonigle took in washing, and there was always a queer, steamy smell arising from suds and wet clothes. There was, too, always a baby; just now there were two, the twins of whom Elizabeth had spoken.

Mrs. McGonigle, bending over her wash-tubs, looked up as the little girls entered and made their request to be allowed to take the babies for an airing. "Hear to that now," she cried in a hearty voice. "Glory be to Peter, but I'll not be refusin' such a little thing as that. Will I let 'em go? I will then, and be thankful to yez for takin' the pair 'av 'em offen me hands. Me husband, pore, weakly sowl that he is, has been ailin' more than usual, an' I've me hands full without watchin' the little wans."

Elizabeth and Betsy did not stand upon further ceremony, but each picked up a blue-eyed wondering baby and took it on her lap.

Mrs. McGonigle stripped her hands of suds and remarked: "I'd better be givin' them a sup before they go, so they'll not be gittin' hungry the while and be onaisy."

The girls thought this a good plan and yielded up their charges to be fed. When they had had their

fill Mrs. McGonigle produced two much soiled worsted shawls in which the babies were wrapped. "There, now," exclaimed the mother, "they'll be as warm as if they was in St. Peter's pocket, the darlin's. If they do be onaisy or cryin' ye'll be bringin' thim home, young ladies."

The girls promised and bore off the babies, the mother watching them with pride, pleased that they should want her babies and yet quite satisfied that two such attractive infants as hers must naturally be desirable.

The two girls toiled up the street with their unaccustomed burdens. Presently Betsy stopped. "Mine's getting pretty heavy," she said.

"So is mine," returned Elizabeth. "We might have brought them in a little cart or something, but I thought it would look so much more, — more, — intimate to carry them."

"Yes, of course," returned Betsy doubtfully; "but though they are good little things, I wouldn't mind if mine were a little further away from my nose."

Elizabeth laughed, but she had to stand still in order to do it, — the extra exertion of carrying the

baby at the same time was a little too much for her powers.

"I think I will sit down on this stone," said Betsy, "for, although my baby isn't as big as yours, it does seem as if it would weigh a ton before we reached your cousin's house."

"I tell you what I will do,"—Elizabeth had a plan; "if you can look after both babies for a few minutes, I will go home and bring back Babs's baby carriage; she doesn't use it any more, and it is in the wood-house where I can easily get it; then we can take the babies in it as far as our house and will only have to carry them the rest of the way. We can take them all the way back to Mrs. McGonigle's in the carriage, too."

Betsy thought this an excellent plan, and agreed to look after both babies. "I don't see why I can't do it as well as Maggie McGonigle," she said, "for she is only eight years old."

So, leaving Betsy with the babies both hunched up on her lap as she sat on the big flat stone by the way, Elizabeth sped home and soon returned with the carriage. The babies were both lifted in and the two self-instituted nursemaids cheerfully pushed

it along. Having reached the lower gate of the Hollins place, they pushed the carriage inside and then took up their burdens again. "I'm thankful we didn't have to carry them all the way," sighed Betsy. "My arm would have been broken before now. I don't see how Maggie McGonigle stands lugging babies around."

"Where was she this afternoon, I wonder," said Elizabeth.

"Oh, I think I saw her with the next oldest ones out in the yard when we were there. There is one just walking and another a little bigger, you know. Here, Josie, you musn't chew that dirty shawl!" She removed the end of shawl from the baby's mouth and instantly the child set up a wail.

"Oh dear, if they begin to cry I don't know what we shall do," said Elizabeth. "I believe Jo is thinking of it; somehow he looks as if he were. Here, Jo, see the pretty flowers. Jumpity, jumpity, jump!" She tried to distract the baby's attention, but was only partially successful, for he continued to fret while his small sister's wail increased in volume until it reached the ears of a lady walking in the garden of the gray house.

She came to the fence and looked over. This time she did not fix her gaze above the heads of the two little girls, but she gave no sign of recognition. "What babies are those?" she asked.

"They are Mrs. McGonigle's," answered Elizabeth.

"Who is she?"

"Well, she washes for us," returned Elizabeth. "She lives in that little white house near the blacksmith's shop. She is very poor, and has a great many children. Her husband is a poor weakly soul."

"Humph!" Miss Darby gave the exclamation in her scornful way. "Bring the babies over here," she ordered.

The two little girls lugged their charges over to the fence, where Miss Darby viewed them critically. "They are very dirty," she said disgustedly. "Will you tell me what you are doing with them away up here?"

"We thought we would take them for a walk," said Betsy. "Their mother is washing, and we thought it would be doing good to help her."

A quizzical look came into Miss Darby's eyes. "I

think in your case charity should begin at home," she said. "I never touch the babies at our Home till the nurses have given them a good bath and have made them perfectly clean. You might contract anything, any sort of disease. Those old filthy shawls are probably reeking with germs. I would advise you to take the babies back to their mother and then go home and change your clothes. I hope neither of you will venture near Ruth till you have done so."

Meekly the two little girls walked away. Their sacrifice had brought them blame instead of praise, and they felt quite downcast. Neither spoke for some time, then Elizabeth said: "Well, at least she spoke to us and looked at us as if we were human beings and not beetles or caterpillars."

This remark broke up regrets and the two laughed; then, having reached the waiting baby carriage, the twins were snugly tucked in and were cheerfully wheeled home to their mother.

As for Miss Darby, she returned to the house and, finding Grandpa Gil on the porch, began to tell him of the sight she had just seen. "I declare, that Elizabeth of Kate's is the oddest child," she began.

"What do you suppose I just caught her and that Tyson girl doing?"

"Nothing very bad, I hope," returned Grandpa Gil.

"Well, no, not bad exactly, but extremely imprudent. They had borrowed two remarkably dirty little babies, and were taking them out for a walk. I hope they will not be seized with any disease from contact with such filth. I warned them to go home immediately and change their clothes."

A smile came over Grandpa Gil's face. He felt sure that Elizabeth had some motive beyond what appeared, and the next time he and she were alone he began to question her. "I hear you and Betsy were parading around with two borrowed babies, the other day," he began. "Did you want live dolls to play with, and were those the only ones you could get?"

"Well, it wasn't exactly that," replied Elizabeth. "We didn't do it to make a play of it, for it was really very hard work, but we did do it for a good cause."

"I suppose you couldn't tell without divulging a secret. We have had a great many secrets, you and

I, Elizabeth, and I think I can keep one pretty well. Can't you tell me?"

Elizabeth was silent for a moment. She did not know exactly how to explain, but it was quite true that if she could tell anyone it would be Grandpa Gil, who was such a friend and who always took her confidences in just the right spirit. "Well, you see," she started by saying, "aunt Eunice dislikes me very much, and my mother is sorry and so is Kathie. They would like to have her like me because she might — now please don't breathe a word of this, Grandpa Gil, for this is the secretest part of the secret — "

"I promise solemnly on my honor as a gentleman, that I will keep the secret inviolate," said Grandpa Gil, with a slight flicker of a smile.

The words sounded a little familiar to Elizabeth, but she was satisfied with the promise, and went on:

"You see she has no nearer relations than mother and cousin Belle, and she is really quite good and generous to most people and I heard mother and Kathie talking about how nice it would be if she had only taken a fancy to me and could help with my education."

Grandpa Gil was listening attentively.

"You know father isn't so very, very rich. I don't mean that we don't have loads to eat and quantities of fuel to keep us warm and more clothes than we can wear, but it is when the educations come that there isn't quite enough. You see Dick is going to college and if I have to go to the Academy at the same time, somebody might have to get left and of course it would be me. Kathie thought she could help out by taking the school here next year, — Miss Jewett is going to be married, you know."

"Yes, I know. Go on, my dear; I am interested in all you are telling me."

"So, you see," Elizabeth continued, "that would be all right, for when my turn came I could teach and send Babs to the Academy while Bert goes to college. But, what do you think? Aunt Eunice has invited Kathie to spend next winter with her and wants to give her lessons in anything she likes, and if she goes where will I be? And if she doesn't go, I shall feel like a pig for keeping her at home on my account. That's the secret, Grandpa Gil."

"I understand; but I still fail to see where the babies come in."

"Oh, I forgot; I didn't finish about aunt Eunice. You know I thought she was very much interested in poor babies, and I thought if she believed I was interested in them, too, she might begin to take more notice of me. She did look right at me and not over my head, but she somehow didn't approve of the McGonigle babies. I wonder if she approves of all the babies she helps."

Grandpa Gil smiled and shook his head. "We won't inquire into that, but I should like you to see, my dear little girl, that when persons do things for a self-interested reason they do not always make the impression they wish. If you had really played nurse for Mrs. McGonigle because you thought only of helping her, you would not have come so far from home, would you?"

"No, I suppose not."

"And do you think your parents would like you to try to win favor from your aunt Eunice by pretending?"

"Oh dear; I see I was all wrong, Grandpa Gil. Mother and father would just hate me to do anything like that, and they would hate to have anything done for me that there was any slyness in

getting. I am sure of that. Father hates anything of that kind."

"I am very sure of that, and that is why I am showing you that you took the wrong way to win your aunt Eunice's favor. I hope some day she will overcome her prejudice in your direction, and when she does you will be glad that it is because you have been your honest, straightforward self and have been a good girl because it is right and lovely to be good and not because there is any material gain to be had from it."

Elizabeth looked very sober; but there was a wistful look in her face, too, and Grandpa Gil understood what she was thinking. "I am sure that your main motive was to please your father and mother," he went on, "and to help them and your sister, but I wouldn't try to do grown-up things before you are able. Do the best you can, and maybe things will come out better than they promise now."

"That is just what mother told Kathie." Elizabeth brightened up. "You are very encouraging, Grandpa Gil. "I feel ever so much better and I won't borrow the McGonigle babies any more,

neither will Betsy." This ended the conversation, but its effect was lasting.

Grandpa Gil sat for some time lost in thought. After awhile he called Miller to bring around the motor car. When it came, he went off without asking anyone to go with him. He stopped at Miss Dunbar's, went in and presently came out with Miss Jewett. The two were in earnest conversation. When the car started off again it turned into the road which led to the Academy.

CHAPTER XVIII

WEDDING GIFTS

MR. KEMP had gone off on a sketching trip with some of his former fellow students. The studio was closed for the time being. Elizabeth, particularly, missed the figure of her friend swinging along the road, hat off, sketch box in evidence. He always gave a cheery call as he passed, and his merry whistle was heard long after he had gone by. It still wanted nearly two months before the close of school, but Miss Jewett's wedding was already talked of, and the new house next to Miss Dunbar's was almost finished. Nothing gave Elizabeth and Betsy more pleasure than to visit this future home of their teacher. Betsy felt a peculiar interest in it because it would be her uncle's, too, and Elizabeth was deeply concerned in anything associated with her beloved Miss Jewett, so the two little girls had many an intimate talk over this new home.

“Uncle Rob says they are going to stay at Miss

Dunbar's till they get the house all furnished, and they want to do it gradually," Betsy informed her friend. "They don't want to go in until it looks cosey and homelike, and the grounds are all cleared up. Of course they are going to be gone for two months on their honeymoon, and will buy most of the things in the city before they come back. Won't it be fun, Elizabeth, to watch them fix up the house; and won't it be funny to say aunt Margaret instead of Miss Jewett?"

Elizabeth sighed. "I wish she were going to be my aunt Margaret, too," she said.

"Maybe she will let you call her so," said Betsy, with a generous impulse. "I am going to ask her."

"Oh Betsy, would you really!" Elizabeth's face was radiant.

"Why, certainly I will; but not yet, of course. I couldn't till she is really my aunt, you know."

"Oh, that will be soon enough," agreed Elizabeth. "I think it was lovely of you to think of that, Betsy. What are you going to give her for a wedding present?"

"I don't know exactly, but something very, very nice, of course."

"Are you and Hal going to give something together, or are you going to give something by yourself?"

"By myself. Hal is going to get it. Aunt Em is going to give them all their flat silver, and probably Hal and I will give silver, too. Mrs. Lynde is going to give them something for the house, — a picture, I think Bess said they were thinking of. Bess is going to give a lamp or a clock, she hasn't decided which."

Elizabeth sighed again. It seemed hard that she could not do as much when she was quite sure that she loved Miss Jewett better than any of these others did. "I don't know what I shall give, — only some little thing," she confessed. "The family will give something nice, I suppose, and Kathie is making some pretty things by hand, things to wear, I mean. Mother hasn't told me whether I can give a separate something or not, but I do so want to. I wish I could hang her walls with wonderful tapestries, and scatter articles of value all through her rooms. I should like to drape her windows with silken hangings and strew soft rugs for her dainty feet, and I fain would crowd her galleries with lovely pictures to gladden her eyes."

Betsy laughed. "She hasn't any galleries, and she wouldn't like them crowded, anyway."

"Oh Betsy, you are so very lateral," said Elizabeth. "You have so much unimagination. I was just picturing to myself a lordly domicil for a favored dame. I wish, — I wish, — I wish I could think of something perfectly beautiful and dandy that I could give her, but alas, Betsy, I am impecunrious."

"You know perfectly well, Elizabeth, that she will not care, and that she will value whatever you give her much more than the gifts of some others I could mention."

"Well, I hope so," returned Elizabeth, somewhat consoled. "I am going to ask Dick the next time he comes home and perhaps he can help me out with an original idea; he often does."

But before Elizabeth saw Dick again a subject came up which so excited her that even Miss Jewett's wedding present was a matter of less importance. It was the very next morning after her talk with Betsy that an announcement was made at school which set all the older pupils to whispering and wondering.

"Before we open school, children," said Miss

Jewett, "I want to say to you that two scholarships have been established at the Academy. These are open to the pupils of this school. One for the boys and the other for the girls. There will be an examination at the end of the term, but the record for the year will be considered as well as the marks of the examination papers. Of course this applies to the older girls and boys only; those who are in our highest class, I mean. Anyone over twelve years of age, that is who has already entered his or her thirteenth year, is eligible. Of course the time is short, but I think it is better so as the regular work of the year will be a fairer test of scholarship than a sudden industrious spurt would be. I am not at liberty just yet to make known the name of the person who has established these scholarships, but this will be done when the names of the fortunate winners are announced."

"When do we take the examinations?" spoke up Phil Selden.

"The last week of the term," Miss Jewett told him. "Instead of the usual examinations, those required by the Academy will be given. They will be written ones, of course."

With all good intention of settling down to work with more than ordinary zeal, the larger boys and girls could not keep their attention absolutely fixed upon their books that morning. One or two of the girls had already made their plans to go off to boarding-school, but of those remaining there were enough to make it a matter of competition, and what a buzz there was when the hour of recess came. Bess declared once and for all that she wasn't going to try. She would go to the Academy, anyhow, and there wasn't the slightest use in wearing out her soul in making an effort to do more than merely pass. Corinne wasn't sure whether she would be in the neighborhood another winter; it would depend upon how long her parents remained abroad. Maria Black was going to boarding-school and wasn't going to bother with an examination. Phil Selden looked very determined when he said: "Well, I, for one, am going to try my level best." Bert was outside the limit of age and did not concern himself. Patsy McGonigle was a little older, being barely twelve. He scratched his head and looked dubious, but didn't say whether he would enter the lists or not.

As for Elizabeth, she was so excited that she could

scarcely speak. She mixed up her words more than ever and went from tragedy to comedy by leaps. "I shall simply respire if I don't get it," she cried. "Oh dear, I wish a fairy would help me. Betsy, who do you suppose is the saintly personage who has done this benefacted deed? Is it male or female? I would kiss his hand upon my bended knees."

"Maybe it isn't a he; maybe it is a she," remarked Betsy. "Oh, Elizabeth, perhaps it is your aunt Eunice."

"Ye shades of Venus! perhaps it is," cried Elizabeth. "Well, I won't kiss her hand, and I won't get on my knees to her. Do you suppose it really could be?"

"I think it could very well be, for you know we are always hearing of the kind and charitable things she does."

"And it would be just like her to do it without unclosing her name until the very last; she's just that kind of animal. I'll bet it is she. The more I think of it the more I am certain. Well, all is I shall be on my most enduring mettle, steel or iron, or whatever it may be. I shall burn the midnight oil and I shall let the sickly hue of resolution be

o'ercast by thought. Oh Betsy, I am so excited I can scarcely retain myself within this narrow body. When the fearsome day comes I shall call upon all the saints, angels and ministers of grace to assist me. If I fail, oh, if I should fail! Perish the unworthy thought! but if I should, I know I shall fall in a dead faint on the floor, and I shall have to be borne out to an early grave. Of course you are going to try."

"I am going to try, I think, because I want a good record, although I suppose I will go to the Academy anyhow, for aunt Em has promised I should."

"Suppose you should get it and I not!" cried Elizabeth. "It would be the most heart-rending tragedy."

Betsy looked at her with startled eyes. "Oh Elizabeth," she said. "I never thought of that. Maybe I will not try after all."

"Oh, but you must if you want to. I should not be satisfied to have anyone make a sacrifice for me."

"I suppose it will have to be as aunt Em and uncle Rob say," returned Betsy thoughtfully. "If they insist upon it I shall have to, I suppose."

So the matter was disposed of and the two went

back into the schoolroom the more eager over their studies than before.

Elizabeth was a bright scholar and Betsy was not far behind. They both stood on a par with one or two of the older girls, and felt that they had good reasons for thinking they could compete with them. Elizabeth poured forth her news at home with all her usual exuberance. Betsy reported it more quietly.

“Elizabeth, if you don’t do your level best,” cried Kathie, “I shall want to shake you.”

“I shall not only want to shake myself,” replied Elizabeth, “but I shall want to hide my undiminished head in solitary places.”

“And if you do get it, what then?” asked Kathie, laughing.

“I shall skip like the roe upon the mountain-top. I shall sing hallelujahs with all my might, and my soul will take wings to the firmament on high with all the blue ethereal sky.”

“Well, my most emotional and dramatically inclined sister, let me give you one piece of advice. Don’t use high-flown language when you are writing your examination papers, and try to acquire a

correct use of words before you do any stunts in English composition."

Elizabeth looked sober. She was well aware that her use of words was open to criticism, for Miss Jewett was often quite severe upon her, but she did so like to flourish high-sounding words. However, it would be no time for the exercise of likes and dislikes, she well knew, and she determined to make a very earnest effort to curb her imagination when it came to such an important thing as an examination. "Kathie," she said, very gravely, "I am really going to try just as hard as I can. I am, I am. If you see any way in which you can help me, please do it, and I won't answer back or anything; I will take it as meekly as a lamb, I will, indeed. All you will have to say if you see signs of rebellion — — —"

"There, now! stop right there," cried Kathie. "Couldn't you say that more simply?"

Elizabeth flushed up. "What must I say? If you see that I don't like it?"

"Yes, that is better. Well, then?"

"If you see that I don't like it," Elizabeth improved still further, "just don't pay any attention, but go on chiding. Is chiding right?"

"Perhaps it would be better to say: Go on correcting me. Very well, honey, I will help you all I can."

"What am I going to give Miss Jewett?" asked Elizabeth. "Betsy and I were talking about the wedding presents, mother, and she and Bess are both going to give something very, very nice."

A little cloud came over Mrs. Hollins's face. "I wish you, too, could give something very, very nice, but I am sure Miss Jewett will be quite as much pleased with some simple thing. She knows you are fond of her, and she also knows that we cannot afford as much as some of our neighbors."

"What are you going to give her, mother?"

"I am having a workstand put in order for her. It is an old one which belonged to my grandmother. We have another, and I thought I could spare this. I know Miss Jewett wants one, for she has often admired the one in my room. I think she will value such a gift more than anything I could buy for her."

"I think so, too, for I know she loves old furniture when it is really nice. I am glad it is something for her very own self. May I tell Betsy, mother?"

"If you like. Perhaps I can find something for

you to give her. I had not really thought of your making a separate gift, but I can readily understand that you would like to."

Elizabeth went off much heartened by this, but the question passed out of her mind when she met Betsy and was told that Miss Tyson and Betsy's uncle both thought it best that she should take the examination. "It will establish your record, if it does nothing more," said Miss Emily. "Even if you do not win the scholarship, your place in the Academy will be understood. It would gratify me very much, of course, if you were to win, although the money consideration is a small part of it."

"If anyone wins, I hope it will be Elizabeth," returned Betsy, "for she really needs it and I don't."

"That may be true, but as she has an equal chance with the others, I do not think we should let her opportunity outrank yours."

So this was what Betsy had to report to her first best, and Elizabeth felt that she must make her very best endeavor to come out ahead of the rest. There would be five girls to compete with and it was going to be a close contest, she feared. The boys would have an equally exciting time, and these last weeks

of school promised to be the very busiest ones of the year. It was well that Mr. Kemp was away, for now there was no temptation to go to the studio. Lessons were always the very first consideration, and Elizabeth worked like a beaver over them. Even the gray house did not see her very often. There was less self-denial in this because Miss Darby was still there, and although Elizabeth still believed that she was the one who had offered the scholarships, she had no great wish to come in contact with the lady. With the scholarships, she might win her great-aunt's approval; if she did not win she felt quite sure that she would be looked upon with even less kindness than at present. There was much at stake, and these were stirring times for Elizabeth.

The pleasanter subject of the approaching marriage came in with a sort of tranquillizing effect. It was the first wedding in which Elizabeth had ever been personally interested, and every detail was known by heart. Kathie was to be one of the bridesmaids, and Hal one of the ushers. Although the wedding ceremony would take place in the city in which Miss Jewett had been living, it might be

possible that Elizabeth could go. Betsy was determined that she should, and had a little scheme of her own which she hoped would work to advantage. She was waiting till she should see her brother Hal before she mentioned it to Elizabeth. She knew Hal would fall in with the scheme and she thought her uncle would, too, but she would bide her time.

So the lovely May days went by, full of so many interests that, long as they were, they were all too short for the things that must be accomplished, and each brought nearer that day of the examinations. Then one morning on the first day of June Elizabeth heard a familiar call and saw Mr. Kemp swinging along past the house. She ran out on the porch to hail him.

He waved gayly to her. "Come over, come over," he called. "I can't stop now, but come over just as soon as you can."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MODEL'S PAY

IT was not till lessons were well off her mind that Elizabeth asked her mother's permission to go to the studio. "Don't stay too long," said her mother as she gave her leave.

"I will try not," answered Elizabeth, "but I shall have such loads to talk about that I may forget. If I am a little wee, wee bit late for supper, shall you mind very much, mother?"

"Not if the bit is very wee. I think you'd better ask Mr. Kemp to take supper with us and then there will be no danger of your being detained."

"That will be very nice," agreed Elizabeth, "for what we don't finish saying we can keep on with as we walk along. Please have waffles, mother; he does like them so much and it will celebrate his coming back."

"I will see," returned Mrs. Hollins, and Elizabeth was satisfied. She found Mr. Kemp busy in his

studio, the door of which was opened wide to let in the soft June air. The room was in a state of confusion, sketches everywhere, and all sorts of odds and ends lying about.

“Hello, Elfie,” he cried, as she appeared in the doorway. “You are just in time to see my new sketches before I put them away. I have done a lot, haven’t I?”

Elizabeth looked around. “All these?” She gave a comprehensive wave of the hand. “You surely have been busy. I have been very busy, too. Oh, Mr. Titian, I have so much to tell you that I don’t know where to begin.”

“Then suppose you go and sit over there on the model stand while I am sorting over these things, and you can reel off all the yarns you like. Your obedient servant will listen with both ears.”

Elizabeth went over and stepped up on the stand. It was a rude affair which Mr. Kemp had made himself. On it stood an antique chair, over the back of which hung some draperies. It was a very familiar seat to Elizabeth, for she had spent many an hour in it. She established herself comfortably and began to talk about the sketches, but Mr. Kemp interrupted

her. "You aren't telling me anything I don't know," he said. "I want your news, not comments on my work. That will keep."

Elizabeth laughed, and launched forth upon an account of all the happenings which had taken place during the few weeks of her friend's absence. Aunt Eunice came in for her share of comment, so did Miss Jewett's wedding, but the paramount subject was the scholarship.

After awhile she drew a long breath. Mr. Kemp stopped in his task of stacking up canvases and said: "Well, you have had stirring times. I certainly hope you will get that scholarship, Elfie, and if there is anything I can do to help just speak the word."

"Oh, I suppose it is all in my eternal self," returned Elizabeth.

"Do you by any chance mean internal?" inquired Mr. Kemp, squinting up his eyes as he held off a canvas at arm's length.

"I suppose I do mean that," responded Elizabeth. "I am afraid that is where my rock of destruction lies. Kathie is trying to help me and make me use right words instead of wrong ones, but once in

awhile I do make a slip, although I am really making a superhuman effort to speak correctly."

Mr. Kemp laughed. "I rather prefer the incorrectness, myself," he remarked. "It makes you a much more original young person to have your own special vocabulary."

"But if it should interfere with my getting the scholarship," answered Elizabeth soberly.

"Oh, then, of course we must not encourage it. I tell you what, though, Elfie; when the strain becomes too great you come down here and let off your sky-rocketty speech; in that way you will be easing yourself and entertaining me."

"I might do that," agreed Elizabeth, rather glad that she could relax from her watchfulness over her speech. "Mr. Kemp, are you going to the wedding?"

"Why, I don't know. I haven't thought much about it, to confess the truth. Are you going?"

"I don't know yet. It is the ardent desire of my heart, and if both Betsy and Bess are there I shall feel a maiden all forlorn to be left at home. Not to have a proper gift and to be deprived of such a boon as attending the happy event is almost too much for my equaliberum."

Mr. Kemp looked up with a merry chuckle. "It does me good to hear your old familiar manner of speech, Elfie," he said. "Why haven't you a proper gift for your beloved Miss Jewett?"

"Don't cause me to enclose the state of the family finances, Mr. Titian. I haven't anything to buy with; that is the whole truth."

"I can sympathize with you because I have often been in that condition myself."

"Oh, but you never need be without a beautiful present to give when you have all these fine pictures."

"That is what I always have to fall back upon, my dear Elfie."

"Are you going to give one to Miss Jewett?" Elizabeth made bold to ask.

"Why, I don't know her so very well, and I really had not thought of giving her anything. I have made her acquaintance only very recently, you see, and Mr. Tyson I have met very seldom."

"But you have known her as long, almost as long, as you have me, and I am sure we are very intimate friends," returned Elizabeth, with the thought of how well one of the pictures would look in the new house.

"Oh, that cannot be so. Why, we have known one another for ages. I can scarcely remember the time when I didn't know you, Elfie."

"It was that day when I was getting the pussy-willows, that we met," said Elizabeth reminiscingly, "and you were painting in the field."

Mr. Kemp turned and began to rummage behind some portfolios. Presently he brought out a canvas. "And here it is," he said. "It is better than I thought, although I like that first real study I made of you later on. I say, Elfie, how do you think this would do for Miss Jewett's wedding present?"

"Oh, I am sure she would love it," cried Elizabeth, well pleased at the suggestion. "She was so delighted with the pussywillows, and kept them on her desk as long as they lasted."

"And she wouldn't object to the presence in the picture of the one who gathered them, you think?" Mr. Kemp looked up with a little half smile.

"Oh Mr. Titian, what a tease you are. I am sure she would not mind, and as for myself it would make me ecstatic to think that I was there and that every time she looked at the picture she would see me."

"Then, my dear Elfie, consider the picture yours."

"What? You don't mean that you are going to give it to me to give to her?" Elizabeth jumped up in sheer delight.

"Why, what else?"

"I thought you meant you, yourself, were going to give it. Oh Mr. Titian, I think it is too much for you to do. I don't think I ought to take it."

"You don't? Well, my dear child, let me tell you that I certainly think I owe you something for sitting for me so patiently and often. A model costs something, you know, and if you will take this in payment for sitting, why, we'll call it quits." He picked up the picture again and advancing toward the model stand dropped on one knee and held it out. "May it please your Majesty to accept this poor offering from you leal knight," he said.

Elizabeth snatched up a piece of dull brocade from the chair, held it around her so that it made a trailing drapery and swept to the edge of the stand. "We are pleased to accept your offering, Sir Knight," she said, "and you may kiss our hand."

This ceremony accomplished, she flung aside the drapery and jumped down. "Oh Mr. Titian," she said, "I think you are the darlingest artist man that

was ever born. Do you really, really think I have earned this? It is so much, so very much nicer to feel that I have."

"I consider that you surely have earned it," replied Mr. Kemp. "Let us see if we can find some sort of simple frame for it. You don't know how much better it will look in a frame."

"Oh, but that would be too much."

"Not a bit of it. I have worked over this a little since that first day, and I may give it one or two more touches. You can leave it here and I will see what sort of frame I can find."

This Elizabeth was ready to do. "If I had searched the world over I couldn't have found anything I would rather give," she said, then asked, "Are you very sure, Mr. Titian, that you might not be able to sell it for a great deal of money and that you will not be sorry tomorrow that you gave it to me?"

"Far be it from me to have any such feeling. I have been paid for it in better coin than gold of the realm, my lady. Your gracious appreciation of my poor gift is worth more than pearls and diamonds."

Mr. Kemp knew that this sort of talk delighted Elizabeth and that it would reassure her as ordinary

language might not. She fairly bubbled over with delight as she said: "There isn't anyone, I don't care who, that will have anything finer to give. Who cares for silver when they can have pictures?"

"Elfie, my sweet child, you voice my ideas exactly," Mr. Kemp assured her. "Have I any silver? Not an ounce. I bought my spoons at the Five-and-Ten-cent store and they serve me well. I enjoy my simple fare quite as much while partaking it from — shall we say near-silver, or shall we speak the truth and call it tin? — I repeat: I spurn your gold, and hug my pictures to my heart." He suited the action to the word.

Elizabeth nodded wisely. "I think I am happier than Bess or Corinne," she said thoughtfully, "and yet I haven't half so much."

"We are philosophers, Elfie. We belong to that happy class who have riches the world wots not of. But, I say, speaking of things to eat, didn't you say something about waffles?"

"I said that I thought we might be going to have them. Is it time? It can't be."

Mr. Kemp consulted his watch. "It is so near that there isn't any fun in it. I don't want to miss

anything that is coming to me. Waffles and honey, is it?"

"Oh yes, honey, of course, and maybe chicken. I am not sure."

"Yum-yum!" exclaimed her friend. "We cannot waste another moment. Come along, Elfie."

They went forth and reached the house just as Electra was bringing in the first plate of waffles. "I was a wee, wee bit late," acknowledged Elizabeth, when all had welcomed back Mr. Kemp, "but if you knew, mother, what a joyous thing has happened you would not be grudging of the extra minutes."

"Hush, hush!" warned Mr. Kemp; "wait till after supper, please, Elfie. You will spoil my appetite if you bring up embarrassing subjects."

So Elizabeth did not tell her news till she had her mother all to herself. "Isn't it the most joyful present that could be?" she said. "Oh mother, I am so happy about it that even if I can't go to the wedding I shall not mind so much."

"But you are going," replied her mother with a smile.

"Oh mother, tell me."

"Betsy came over awhile ago and said her uncle wanted her to say that he specially wanted you to go with Betsy as her guest, and he added that he would not feel himself really married unless you were there to see that the contract was carried out properly."

"Isn't that just like him?" Elizabeth laughed. "I do love Mr. Robert, although he will never get done teasing me about contracts. I love so many people, mother. Everyone is so perfectly lovely to me; I mean everyone except aunt Eunice. I am so happy, that I could even love her if she would let me."

"Bless your heart, child, I believe you could," replied her mother, kissing her.

"May I wear my yellow dress to the wedding?" inquired Elizabeth. "Will it be suitable, mother?"

"I was thinking of a new white one, but if you would rather wear the yellow I have no objection."

"I think I would rather," agreed Elizabeth. "I suppose there is no chance of my being so favored as to have a new hat," she added wistfully.

"Why, my dear, I don't know. I will do my best. What would you like?"

"Oh, if I could have a yellowish one with nasturtiums on it I would love it."

"Well, dear, I cannot promise, but I will do my best. I realize that it is an important occasion, but you see there are so many things to get for Kathie's bridesmaid dress, that I am afraid you must come out at the little end of the horn."

"Oh well, never mind," said Elizabeth cheerfully. "Maybe I would be too happy if I had everything I want. Could I go down and see Betsy just a little while? I want to thank her for coming up and I want to thank her for inviting me; Mr. Robert, too, I want to thank him, too, and I want to tell Betsy about the picture. I don't see how I can wait till morning, mother."

Her mother laughed. "I don't see how you can either. I never saw such an excited little body. At this rate what will you be by the time all these unusual things are over?"

Elizabeth gave a long sigh. "Now you remind me of that fearsome examination. It stares me in the face like a sheeted ghost."

"Don't think about it, dear child. Run along to Betsy and I will let Electra stop and bring you home; she is going down into the village."

So Elizabeth danced away to Betsy, and if their tongues did not run it was not because they had nothing to talk about.

CHAPTER XX

THE LOCKED DOOR

THE dreaded day at last arrived. Elizabeth was so nervous that her mother felt a deep compassion for the child. "I almost wish there were no scholarship to be won," she said to her husband. "Elizabeth is such an intense sort of little body that I am afraid she will be actually ill if she fails."

"I don't believe she is going to fail," returned Mr. Hollins hopefully.

Betsy was almost as anxious as Elizabeth, not for herself, for all that she really cared for was to get a worthy mark, but she did care very much for Elizabeth. Corinne had withdrawn from the race, as she had received word that her parents would return before long. There were, then, but four contestants to look upon as rivals, for the two great friends.

"Oh, Elizabeth, I do hope and pray you will get it," whispered Betsy, as they took their places. Elizabeth was beyond words, but she gave Betsy's

hand a nervous squeeze, and by the coldness of the eager fingers Betsy knew the state of Elizabeth's feelings.

It was a solemn-faced little company which Miss Jewett overlooked, but she gave each an encouraging smile, as she told them to sit one desk apart in alternate rows. She explained what the work would be and herself wrote the first set of questions on the board.

The children fell to work with eagerness. There was not a sound except a sigh from one or another overwrought heart, the subdued rustle of papers, and the scratching of pens. At the end of the first hour the papers were collected. That much over, Elizabeth felt rather confident that she had answered all her questions correctly. So far, good.

Next came an examination in United States history. Facts Elizabeth was familiar with, and she expected to be able to answer every question rightly. She went over them carefully and began her answers, writing with precision and making an effort to use simple words. She went on swimmingly until about half her work was done, then she suddenly came to a halt. The date of the battle of Alamance,

Alamance? Alamance? What did she know about it? For the life of her she could not think. She looked at the board and back again at her paper. She glanced at the clock. She looked over at Betsy. Finally she concluded that she would leave the question for awhile and go back to it when she had finished the rest. This she did, finding no further trouble. The time was almost up when she again cudgelled her brains. She became more and more nervous as the moments sped. Why was she so stupid? What was the matter with her that this thing had failed to stick in her memory? She felt desperate.

Betsy, looking up, caught the distressed expression and knew that something had gone wrong. Her own paper was about complete. She had remembered all about Alamance, even to the exact date. There it was plainly written: "May 16, 1771." She wondered what it was that was troubling Elizabeth. Of course she could not ask, but she did so wish that she knew. Supposing Elizabeth were to get a lower mark than herself and thus lose the scholarship. That would never do. Betsy looked down at her neat paper which showed correct answers to

the ten questions given. She looked over at Elizabeth's sheet lying spread out before her, and saw a blank space which came, she guessed, in about the place where the answer to Alamance should be. Elizabeth's two hands were buried in her curly locks, her eyes were fixed on the paper, but she did not make a move to write anything further. The hands of the clock were approaching the close of the hour; in another minute the papers must be handed in. As if knowing that Betsy was watching her, she turned around and gave her a despairing look. The clock struck the hour. There was a rustle of papers as the different contestants gathered them up. Betsy dipped her pen in the ink, hastily made a mark which converted 1771 into 1774 and took up her paper. Elizabeth hurriedly scribbled something in the blank space, feeling that an error was better than nothing, and followed Betsy.

The rest of the day went fairly enough. All were earnest and serious, and did their very best. At last it was over; the long dreaded moments had actually passed. With a smile Miss Jewett dismissed them. "I can at least attest to your having been good workers," she said. "I never saw such very deep

interest. I wish there was a scholarship for each one of you, but as it is I can only wish good-luck to you all. We shall see how it comes out by day after tomorrow, I think."

Elizabeth and Betsy clasped hands as they went out the door. "It is over," said Elizabeth, "and I feel like a rag. I think I did pretty well with most of the questions, though I did get rattled over the history. There was one question that I couldn't seem to get, and I waited, hoping it would come to me, but it didn't and at the very last minute I just put down something. Oh Betsy, I wonder if you know the date of the battle of Alamance. What did you put down?"

"I put down May 16, 1774," replied Betsy calmly.

"And I said 1775; I wonder which is right. I shall look the minute I get home. I don't see why they picked out a little unimportant thing like that to ask us."

"But it isn't unimportant," declared Betsy. "It was really the first strike for freedom; it was in North Carolina, you know, long before Concord and Lexington and all that."

"Oh, dear me, so it was. I remember all about

it now. How very stupid of me to forget. It all comes back to me now, but, Betsy, I think it was even earlier than we have made it; I don't believe either one of us is right."

"Then if we are both wrong there is no harm done," said Betsy with a smile.

"How can we live till day after tomorrow?" Elizabeth went on.

"We shall have to think about the wedding and that will take our minds off unpleasant things," returned Betsy. Then they fell to discussing this great event and no more was said about the battle of Alamance then or at any other time, for Betsy kept her own counsel.

If the two girls were excited on the day of the examinations they were more so on that morning when Miss Jewett announced that she was ready to give the name of the successful competitors. You could have heard a pin drop in the schoolroom. Two fiery spots burned in Elizabeth's cheeks. Betsy was very pale, even Bess looked less placid than usual, for she really was most anxious that Elizabeth should win. Phil Selden nervously fingered a pencil, then thrust his hands in his pockets and sat with eyes

fixed on his desk. Patsy McGonigle looked around with a broad grin.

"I will first tell you," said Miss Jewett, "that it is Mr. Henry Gilmore who has established these scholarships, and I am sure he —" but the clapping of hands broke in upon the sentence. Elizabeth clapped more vigorously than any of the rest. Dear Grandpa Gil, why had she never thought of its being him? She was conscious that in case of success she would be thankful that it was not aunt Eunice to whom she must offer her thanks.

Miss Jewett looked around with an indulgent smile. "That is right," she said. "I am glad you all feel like applauding. I do myself. The boy who received the highest marks in the examination is Patsy McGonigle." For some reason everyone giggled, and Patsy turned very red, squirming in his seat most awkwardly. "I must say that Patsy's record in school is good, too, except in the matter of deportment," Miss Jewett went on; "but even that does not place him so low as to lose him the scholarship. The next, I may state, is Phil Selden, who lacks very little of being even with Patsy. The trustees give Phil honorable mention."

This, however, appeared small comfort to Phil, who looked as if he could cry. He did want that scholarship so badly, and to be outdone by a little rascal like Patsy was almost too much. Patsy's grin had disappeared. Even when Bert thumped him on the back, this being his way of offering congratulations, Patsy only squirmed away, and presently arose to his feet. "Miss Jewett, ma'am," he said, "might I speak a wurrud?"

"To be sure, Patsy," replied Miss Jewett. "Me mother was sayin', Miss Jewett," Patsy began, "that was I to git the scholarship, she'd be turr'ble proud, but afther all, ma'am, she was thinkin' I was full young to be goin' so far to school, and how would I be gittin' there, says she, an', I bein' the oldest, how would she git at me if me father was took worse or one av the little ones fell in the fire or annything like that, an', says she, 'Patsy, me boy, I think ye'd best not be thinkin' of it for another year. Ye'll be gettin' good schoolin' enough where ye are, for awhile, and, says she, if so be it comes to ye, just ye be thankin' the schoolmistress and say ye'll be stayin' where ye are for awhile yet.'" Then Patsy sat down.

Miss Jewett threw a smiling glance at Phil. "If that is so, Patsy," she said, "then of course the scholarship will go to Phil Selden; you know that."

"Yes, ma'am. It's all right."

"I congratulate you both," Miss Jewett said, "but we must not talk about this any more just now, for I know there are some very anxious girls here. I won't keep them waiting a moment longer. The scholarship for the girls goes to Miss Elizabeth Hollins."

"Oh!" Elizabeth could not refrain from an ecstatic exclamation. She clutched Betsy fiercely.

"Honorable mention is given to Betsy Tyson," Miss Jewett went on. "The contest was very close, but Elizabeth came out a little ahead."

A soft color suffused Betsy's face and she cast down her eyes. How glad, how very glad she was of that little mark which made a figure one into a four.

Elizabeth flew home on wings of joy. It seemed to her as if her feet scarcely touched the earth. She rushed into the house pell-mell, crying out, "Where is mother? Where is Kathie? It's mine! It's mine!"

Electra appeared from the kitchen. "What's all

this to-do about?" she asked. "Your mother and Miss Kathie have both gone up to your Cousin Belle's."

Elizabeth did not wait for anything further, but was out of the door like a flash, and racing up the street as if running for a wager. They were all gathered on the porch when she reached the gray house, her mother, Kathie, cousin Belle, Grandpa Gil, Ruth and aunt Eunice. The presence of the last-mentioned did not dampen Elizabeth's enthusiasm on this occasion, and she rushed into the midst of the group, throwing herself into her mother's arms, crying: "I've got it! It's mine! It's mine!"

Aunt Eunice looked at her severely. "What is hers?" she asked Mrs. Gilmore.

"Is it the scholarship?" cried Kathie. "Oh, Elizabeth, have you really won it?"

"Oh, I have, I have!" replied Elizabeth in tones of triumph. Then she rushed over to Grandpa Gil and wound her arms around his neck. "Oh, dearest, dearest Grandpa Gil," she said. "I know now that it was you; it was all you who did it." Then suddenly, without another word, she collapsed upon the floor and began to sob from sheer excitement.

"There, there, dear child," expostulated Grandpa Gil, "don't do that. Why, I thought you wanted to win, and now will you cry about it? Come here and dry your eyes. I want to whisper something to you."

"I'm — I'm crying," stammered Elizabeth, "because all my laugh is used up and there are no commotions left but the crying ones."

Then everyone, even aunt Eunice, laughed; and Elizabeth recovered sufficiently to go to Grandpa Gil and hear what he had to say.

"I counted on your winning," he whispered, "and that is the chief reason why there is a scholarship at all."

"So you have actually won the scholarship," aunt Eunice's clear, crisp voice came in. "I am very much pleased with you, Elizabeth. I confess I didn't expect it was in you. Come here, my child."

Elizabeth left Grandpa Gilmore's side, where she would much rather be, and went to her aunt. "I wish to show my appreciation of your good effort," said aunt Eunice, "and should like you to accept this. You will probably need new school books, and it will go toward the purchase of them."

Elizabeth's hand closed over a coin which aunt

Eunice put into it. "Thank you very much," she said quietly. "I am glad I have done something to please you, aunt Eunice," she added.

Miss Darby looked at her great-niece sharply. She did not know whether the remark was made in sarcasm or not, but, seeing Elizabeth's innocent look, she assumed a more amiable expression. "The money is yours to do with as you please," she said. "Your mother can help you decide upon the best use to make of it. I only suggested the books." Aunt Eunice restored her pocket-book to the little bag from which she had taken it and Elizabeth felt herself dismissed.

Of course, there were congratulations from all the rest, and there were many questions about the other contestants. Elizabeth gave a humorous account of Patsy's speech. She was a good mimic and imitated him perfectly. Then she must run home to tell her father the glad news, and as it was time to end their own visit, Mrs. Hollins and Kathie left too.

"What was it aunt Eunice gave you?" asked Kathie, as they were walking down the shady road.

"I haven't looked," said Elizabeth, opening her hand in which she held the coin. "Why, it's gold,"

she exclaimed. "It felt so little that I didn't think it was more than a dime. How much is it, mother? I don't know much about gold pieces."

Her mother looked at it. "Why, it is five dollars, my dear."

"Really? Why, I don't believe I expressed my gratification half pleasedly enough. Do you think I ought to go back and do it over again?"

"No, my dear; I think you have said quite as much as can be required of you," her mother replied, to Elizabeth's relief.

The child looked wistfully down at the money in her hand. "I never had so much," she said. "Do you think I should spend it on school books, mother?"

"Why, my dear child, I think that as you have done so well and have made it so easy for us all that the least we can do is to buy your books for you. You shall do just as aunt Eunice said; spend it as you please."

"Oh mother, would it buy the hat?"

"I am sure it would."

"Then may I? May I?"

"If that will please you the most, you may, assuredly. Kathie must make one more trip to the

city before the wedding and you might go with her to select what you would like."

"Will you take me, Kathie? I beseech you with all the ardency of my nature."

"Why, of course I will," responded her sister heartily. "I think if we get the hat untrimmed and the flowers separate, that I can trim it and it will not cost so much, or we can get finer flowers for it in that way."

And so the nasturtium hat was bought, and Elizabeth's cup of happiness was full. Betsy was no less happy. She had received high praise from her aunt and uncle, who said that she had done them credit, and that they were quite as well pleased with her honorable mention as with the scholarship; in fact, they were more pleased because she had so nearly won it, and as things were it was better that Elizabeth should be first.

Loyal, good, little Betsy said never a word about the battle of Alamance, but took the praise sedately and turned her thoughts to the wedding, now but a few days off.

As for the event itself, it was like most others, except that among the guests rarely are three happier

girls than those who sat side by side, one in yellow, one in white and one in blue, and who were the first to kiss the bride after her own family had done so.

They all rode home together in the gloaming, tired but very, very content. The new house for the newer Mrs. Tyson loomed up among the trees. Opposite stood the schoolhouse, silent and deserted.

“The door is locked,” murmured Elizabeth to Betsy, “locked for us always.”

“Why, no, it isn’t,” returned Betsy. “We can go in if we like sometimes.”

“I didn’t mean just that,” replied Elizabeth, with a backward look at the familiar door; but Betsy did not follow the flight of Elizabeth’s thoughts, which were already speeding on through future years.

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